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METAPHYSICS

and

THE OTHER

by David Boothroyd

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D in the
Department of Philosophy at the University of
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Summary

This thesis is about the relationship between ethics and language in the work of the contemporary French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. The approach taken is to place his work in the context of a current debate in philosophy about the limits of language and the end(s) of philosophy. In the first chapter it looks at the place and significance of the thinking of Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Derrida in this debate, and locates Levinas' thinking within it by examining his reading of Descartes. The thesis then goes on to examine the major themes in Levinas' work and offers an interpretation of his claims for the "primacy" of the ethics which demonstrates their bearing on the traditional concern with the relationship between metaphysics and *the other*. The thesis makes special reference throughout to Jacques Derrida's first major essay on Levinas, "Violence and Metaphysics".

The thesis demonstrates the sense in which in Levinas "ethics" is the 'enactment' of the philosophical concern with *the other*. It explores in detail the overlap between this concern with *the other* in philosophy and the relationship to the other person, in Levinas' thinking. This is undertaken, in this thesis, in the form of a detailed analysis of the relationship between the key notions of the *face to face* and the *third party* as is found in his first major work Totality and Infinity. The analysis is then extended to the later work Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence. In this context, the thesis demonstrates how the *beyond being* is held to signify within philosophy, by inspiring philosophy with the thought of *the other*. The thesis as a whole considers how, in Levinas, the *beyond being* and the relation to *the other* are antecedent to their thematic representation in philosophy. It examines how the *necessity* of their representation is related, in Levinas, to a certain *injustice* vis a vis the other person.

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List of Abbreviations

- THI The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology (La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl), trans. A. Orianne,, Northwestern U.P., Evanston, 1973.
- EE Existence and Existents, Martinus Nijhoff, (De l'existence à l'existant), trans. A.Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1978.
- TI Totality and Infinity (Totalité et Infini), trans. A.Lingis, Duquesne Univ. Press, Pittsburgh, 1969.
- OTB Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (Autrement qu' être ou au-dela de l'essence), trans. A.Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1981.
- For the above works, original French edition page references are provided as the second number in the parentheses.
- TA "Time and the Other" (Le temps et l'autre"), trans. R.Cohen, unpub. Shortly to be published by Duquesne U.P. (1987)
- TO "On the Trail of the Other" (Le trace de L'autre), trans. D.J.Hoy, in Philosophy Today, Vol.10, No.1, 1966, pp.34-46.

List of Abbreviations (continued)

- BT Being and Time (Sein und Zeit), trans.
McQuarrie and Robinson, Harper Row, New
York, 1962.
- ECM "En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me
voici", in Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas,
ed. Francois Laruelle, Jean Michel, Paris,
1980, pp.21-60
- VM "Violence and Metaphysics" in Writing and
Difference (L'écriture et la Différance),
trans. A.Bass, Univ. of Chicago, 1978.
- RoM "The *Retrait* of Metaphor", in Enclitic,
Vol.2, Fall, 1978.
- PS Phenomenology of Spirit (Phänomenologie
des Geistes), trans. A.V.Miller, Oxford
U.P., 1977

CHAPTER ONE

THE MULTIPLICITY OF ENDS

Introduction

The difference between the me and the non-me, like embodiment, precedes any reflection on the nature of identity and difference. The unity of Being is not given to thought. Thinking is, rather, given as the restoration of the unity of Being; as the resolute assumption of this task. Philosophy is then reflection on and the generation of the manifold relations between the me and the non-me; the same and the other. Everything is in sight including the relationality by which *what* is in sight is made intelligible - the unity of Being is thus preserved in its being permitted to assert itself. The other stands in some relation to the same, always presented either in its being other than myself, as *for-me* or *mine*. The relation might be understood to be empirical, dialectical, historical, sociological, etc. In each case it is a relation of *knowing* this other, such that it might be said that I *am* a knowing of this other. In Hegel the moment of self-knowledge is inseparable from my knowing of the other in its otherness. Does this thought imply the *reduction* of the truly other to the same? Or in Descartes, for example, does the identification of knowing and being in the *cogito* indicate the reunification of the me and the non-me in the same? If

the answer to these questions is yes and if, in addition, this suppression of the absolutely other is a characteristic trait of the metaphysics of Being, then it is despite all this that the thought of the absolutely other returns to haunt philosophy and challenge the autonomy of Being. The thought of the absolutely other, the Other, dispelled by the first thought as a naivety, returns and challenges the autonomy of Being asserted in themes seeking to exclude the Other, by dismissing it as pre-philosophical. The Other is suppressed at the outset in being presented as the object of thematic thought, be that thought in the form of idealism, realism or whatever.

The philosophy since Hegel which has grasped the necessity of seeking a passage between the two extremes of idealism and realism, has most notably been undertaken in the form of phenomenology. Phenomenology is also a transcending of the subject/object distinction, around which the whole of conceptuality is structured. It has sought, in various ways, to transcend the difference between the self and the other on the basis of some form of reduction. This reduction is not merely of the identity of the subject, but also its very subjectivity. Heidegger, for instance, reduces the subject to the mere Da of Sein, when he says Dasein, and relegates the self/other

distinction to the realm of the ontic, demonstrating how the everyday experience of the world is determined by it. But are not the parameters for this passage between idealism and realism conceived entirely within a thinking that has always *already* dispelled the thought of the absolutely other? The passage sought between idealism and realism may be taken, on this model, to escape the extremism of thinking Being as subject or object, but does it not, at the same time, remain closed to the Other? Heidegger's thinking in fact exposes this danger for the first time, on the basis of the ontological difference. The question then becomes one as to whether the reduction of subjectivity in terms of this difference, despite it certainly not being the same difference as that which differentiates idealism from realism, itself represents the recurrence of the doctrine of the unity of Being. Does Heidegger's thinking represent the most profound demonstration of the internal workings of a totality and little beyond that, as the contemporary French thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, suggests, and can the thinking of the ontological difference be encompassed within *ethical metaphysics*?

This thesis explores Levinas' work in the context of these questions. It locates it within a tradition of thinking concerned with the *end of philosophy* and

examines in detail key points in his major work Totality and Infinity and later developments in his Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, in which his claims for the "primacy" of "ethics" are most powerful, provoking and *questionable*. The first chapter of this essay provides the reader with the philosophical context of the reading of Levinas offered in the essay as a whole. It presents a synopsis of the thinking of the *end* of philosophy in Heidegger, Hegel, Nietzsche, along with an account of the *incisive* and critical gathering of these various theses in the work of another contemporary French thinker, Jacques Derrida. Levinas' general thesis of the primacy of ethics having been introduced at the end of this first chapter, in terms of his reading of Descartes, Chapter 2 is interested in his relation to phenomenology in general and explains his retention of the "phenomenological method" in view of his rejection of Husserl's understanding of the method's significance. The chapter pinpoints the resurrection of the subject in Levinas' metaphysics, against its "dissolution", in post-Hegelian ontologies, as the crucial move in developing a notion of the *same*. This notion of the same, as is made clear later on, facilitates a thinking of the other otherwise than it is thought by the tradition. This new way of thinking (it) is allegedly one which breaks (with) the unity of Being. At this stage this shift is presented

as a move away from the thinking of the subject, or the *ego*, in terms of its identity in favour of its "substantivity". In this chapter the "ethical" significance of this is provisionally explored. Chapters 3 and 4 draw extensively on Derrida's reading of Levinas given in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics". Chapter 3 demonstrates the manner in which Levinas' discourse represents a transgression of metaphysics *from within* and exhibits a profound sense of the *necessity* by which philosophy occurs as ontological metaphysics. Chapter 4 shows this as it is seen to be at work in various parts of Levinas' two major works. Chapter 4 is therefore the centrepiece of the thesis because it deals closely with the point in TI at which the *ethical relation* is confronted with the necessity of its own *being*; its being as a social phenomenon, in the form of *third* relations. If it is the case that the Levinasian text is 'recaptured' by metaphysics, then it is at this point that most can be learnt from his work about the nature and necessity of this recapture. For this *opening*, which the ethical relation is claimed to signify, to be genuine, on the other hand, then the thought *requires* the *otherwise than being* (to [be] precisely that and not merely *to be otherwise*). This is certainly a point at which the Levinasian text demands much of 'us'; demands our

thinking otherwise (than) to accomodate the thought philosophically.

Chapter 5 deals with Levinas' expression of the way of the *opening* or breach of ontological metaphysics is accomplished, referring to his presentation of this in the later work, OTB, as a reduction in reverse - the reverse movement he refers to as the "unsaying of the said". This final chapter gives the sense in which Levinas' work is a strikingly original theory about the relationship between ethics and language and establishes a post-Heideggerian framework for a new reading of the tradition. Finally, Chapter 5 presents an interpretation of the *opening...* of metaphysics we encounter in Levinas in terms of what it claims to be 'positively'. It is found that the *anarchical* past stated and approached within philosophy, and whose authenticity Levinas' claims for the ethical both require and insist upon, is not something *mysterious*; the mystery of something absent; something always already past: To be in the *trace* of the Other in Levinas is not to arrive on the scene too late, because the movement of opening he presents is the *passage* into the time of the Other. In Levinas, human life is not characterized as being too late for the *beginning* and too mortal to wait for the *end* of history and time: "To live an eternal life is to be able to judge history

without waiting for its end." Does Levinas' thinking give us a sense of the relation to the Other which escapes the infinite regression of thinking caught between sense and nonsense? This thesis is intended as a contribution to the understanding of this question.

The Multiplicity of Ends

Every philosopher at some stage in his thinking comes to reflect on the end to which his thinking is directed. In different times, in different traditions this reflection has manifested itself in different ways; either implicitly or explicitly, in the form of a question or of an assumption, as eschatology, as teleology. That the notion of the *end of philosophy* has in various forms always been a matter of interest for philosophy suggests not only that it *has* a history in philosophy, but is part of its essential fabric. For this reason no history of philosophy could ever seriously consider itself to be independent of a philosophy of history. Accordingly philosophy must acknowledge to itself the indeterminate nature, or perhaps the interpretative status, of all the representations it makes to itself of its own relation to the *end of philosophy*; it must recognise its own essential role as participant in this drama rather than mere spectator.

That the notion of the end of philosophy has a history which can be traced, is not itself a ground upon which to choose to look at any particular philosophy or text. However, the thinkers toward whom this thesis directs

its attention in what follows immediately, and throughout, are thinkers for whom the end of philosophy is understood to be related to the very movement of history in a most significant way. Despite this island of common ground shared by these thinkers, there is an ocean of difference which separates the thinking of Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Derrida and Levinas. These differences are in turn reflected in the manifold senses of *the end* which emerge in their theses and which we shall represent in this first chapter. We shall demonstrate the way in which the end of philosophy is encountered in each without raising issues of comparative assessment. As will become clear in the course of this thesis, a straightforward comparative critique would itself involve the presupposition of a certain concept of *the end* and adopting such a style would therefore be inconsistent with what the thesis goes on to discuss. In the course of the critical exposition presented here we shall see what kind of issues lie at the heart of discourse in so far as it makes a meditation on the 'absolutely other' the key to thinking end of philosophy.

Hegel

In Hegel the telos of philosophy is conceived in terms of the 'completion' (Vollendung) of metaphysics. In The Phenomenology of Spirit this is understood as the historical becoming (Geschichte) of the absolute. This notion is to be distinguished from that of a history (Historie) of intellectual development, or any simple chronology of events. This is best achieved by considering the manner in which the Absolute is said to be "with us" at each stage of our thinking as it moves toward absolute knowing. The following sketch of Hegel's thinking of the end of philosophy shows the sense in which it is an aspect of each 'shape' of consciousness. It also serves to introduce the notion of the reversal of consciousness as it is to be found in Hegel.

Hegel thought that the philosophical thinking of his day had become alienated from itself and was directionless. It took its end and fundamental concern to be the satisfactory resolution of the epistemological problems associated with cognition. After Descartes knowledge and certainty appeared to be the natural concerns of philosophy rather than the phenomenon of knowing. Indeed, in Kant the centrality of these concerns for philosophy is confirmed by making

them an aspect of reason itself. According to Hegel, however, cognition is thus made "the instrument...or the medium through which one discovers" the Absolute (PS §73).

Hegel attempts to show that the interminability of the problems that such thinking raises for itself, are the result of certain assumptions unquestioningly adopted at the outset. Thought "takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an instrument and as a medium and assumes that there is a difference between ourselves and this cognition." (ibid). Such thinking thus posits the truth of cognition and in the same move renders this truth radically inaccessible (in itself). Hegel's remarks on the role of cognition are not offered as critical analysis, nor for that matter do they seek to reject critical metaphysics: on the contrary, Hegel is the first thinker to attempt to philosophize without choosing between these two alternatives and in doing so to write a history of philosophy in which critique is based on something more fundamental. By means of descriptive phenomenology alone Hegel presents an account of critical consciousness as the result of an entire process of self-formation. This consciousness remains opaque to itself, it is ignorant. Ignorant not, however, in the sense of not knowing something which in principle is not accessible to it, but ignorant in the

more profound sense of the limitation which is intrinsic to the system by which it develops itself. This system is limited by its conception of truth as certainty. Hegel proposes the existence of a higher or more fundamental order of self-reflection to which he gives the name "phenomenological experience". Phenomenological experience reveals critical consciousness to be a mere stage in the development of Spirit.

Hegel's starting point could be described as Cartesian, but his way follows a path of reflection upon subjective experience rather than radical doubt and the search for the certainty of objective existents. The first significant discovery of this meditation is that consciousness of something is always accompanied by the consciousness of being conscious of that object. Consciousness thus distinguishes between its object and its own relatedness to its object, and it does so in the same moment. It was the failure to grasp this simple fact about consciousness, namely that this distinction occurs entirely within consciousness, which prompted philosophers coming before Hegel to think truth and falsity in terms of the non-correspondence of being in itself and being for itself. With this strict antithesis, philosophy inflicted on itself the "fear of falling into error". Hegel freed philosophy of this

fear by simply pointing out that the experience of knowing is a state in which consciousness adopts an attitude to its own state of knowledge and that this is intrinsic to what knowledge, or better to say, knowing, is. By this simple reflection on the nature of consciousness Hegel inaugurated a revolution deposing epistemology from its throne in favour of a republic in which there is no "royal road" to the Absolute. Consciousness progresses towards the Absolute with a necessity, of which Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit is one of the finest expressions in the history of philosophy. Later in this thesis we shall see the sense in which it is meditation on this necessity that produces the multiplicity of ends, i.e. philosophies about the end of philosophy, referred to in the title of this chapter.

The contradiction between the two moments of consciousness generates the fundamental movement of consciousness along its path. In actually reading The Phenomenology of Spirit we are captured by it and launched on the way it announces. We ourselves "are setting foot on the pathway of the natural consciousness which is pressing forward to true knowledge" (PS §77). Natural consciousness proceeds in response to the incommensurability of the two moments of consciousness; between the being-for-consciousness

of the object and consciousness- of-self-related-to-the-object. Clearly the standard by which the inadequacy of these is judged can only be a product of their difference. It may seem that as the adequation occurs within consciousness then it must be arbitrary and therefore what we have here is a form of idealism. However, the important point is simply this: consciousness makes this judgment, and this is what is of interest to phenomenology. Indeed, the standard changes as does the object, for the standard was based on the object qua known-object. The negation by which consciousness rejects its first object is of course not an arbitrary negation (we know this if only because we know it as well as we know anything else): it is a determinate negation of the first object. If it did arise out of an empty, abstract, or non-referring negation then we would not experience any of the 'resistance' characteristic of our worldly lives. Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts this well,

"We would never be aware of adjusting ourselves to things and reaching them where they are, beyond us, but would be conscious only of restricting our thoughts to the immanent objects of our intentions."

The progress of natural consciousness does not, however, enable it to instantaneously free itself from its own natural attitude, but it does move in that

direction; it educates itself. At each moment "natural consciousness exists essentially in immediate unity with the total situation which at any given time dominates and determines it."² This unity is what Hegel calls the "shape" of consciousness. Natural consciousness neither disappears nor becomes redundant when it finds itself inadequate to the new object; it survives by assimilating the new object and adopting a new shape. What is presented to it by real consciousness becomes part of its total physiognomy. The progress of natural consciousness can be represented as a series of experiences, but this progression is not in itself the goal pursued by the phenomenologist. We normally understand experience as that within which all appearance (parousia) occurs, but the notion of phenomenological experience introduced by Hegel is held to be that within which the appearance of experience itself is experienced. Phenomenological consciousness grasps the ordinary notion of experience in the form of a reflection by means of which it 'stands back' from it, a move by which it is able to describe the distinct moments of consciousness. We, the phenomenologists, can look on in such a way as to have a perspective on the path of consciousness. Were it not for the appearance (or phenomenological experience) of experience, then natural consciousness would take phenomenal knowledge as adequate to its object and

identify itself with it; it would remain unquestioned by that consciousness which might otherwise perceive an inadequacy between standard and object. The result of this would be that the movement towards the Absolute would not take place. Of course natural consciousness experiences phenomenal knowledge and develops in response to this experience, but without the benefit of phenomenological experience it is limited. This is precisely the situation of critical philosophy, which cannot come to know itself for what it really is. When consciousness begins to phenomenologise it begins to see that for phenomenological experience to be known to consciousness, it must relate to it prior to any objectification. Without this, consciousness only concerns itself with 'experience' in the ordinary sense; therefore only with the new shape of consciousness and not with its development as such. For phenomenological consciousness to be able to observe the development of consciousness, it must do so without it making a contribution to the development of that consciousness itself. It must, as Hegel says, be "pure apprehension" of this process. As it stands, this explanation is unsatisfactory because we are unable to assert the qualitative distinction between natural and phenomenological consciousness independently of the fact that the self-apprehension of the latter comes about as an examination of the former; pure

apprehension is always of something, namely, the dialectical movement of consciousness. If phenomenological consciousness is to contribute *nothing* to its object (which it must if it is to be of a truly different order than natural consciousness) then it must relate to itself without taking itself to be an object; it must be transparent to itself. As phenomenological consciousness cannot become an object for itself it cannot make itself an object of reflection. What it experiences in this moment is the collapse of the distinction between the two consciousnesses; consciousness of the object and consciousness of being consciousness of that object are experienced as *the same*. Phenomenological consciousness does not represent itself to itself as in reflection but knows itself 'implicitly', with an immediacy and without recourse to intellection. Whatever word might be used to name the movement by which phenomenological consciousness experiences its own being, what is important for Hegel is that this moment is experienced as the reversal of consciousness. The unity of consciousness is experienced in the same moment as the distinction between knowing subject and object-known-by-the-subject disappears. It is this totality which is the object for the phenomenologist. Hegel calls this the 'reversal' because "we" no longer think from the perspective of consciousness in its

opposition to objects, but rather from objects qua negated by consciousness.

"This way of looking at the matter is something contributed by us, by means of which the succession of experiences through which consciousness passes is raised into a scientific progression." (PS §87)

Our contribution (unsere Zutat) elevates the path of consciousness to Science. As this presents itself, namely, as the end term of the series, it is clear that it is in a sense the 'result' of the path of consciousness. Consciousness also realizes at this moment that this result is no accident and therefore it must be the case that the path of consciousness had been Scientific all along: "Because of this necessity, the way to Science is itself already *Science*." (PS §88)

The becoming of the totality was (as "we" now know it to have been) at each stage a participation in the Absolute. "We" may now wonder ^{as to} where our new understanding of the Absolute has brought us, given that what we previously took to be the goal of thinking turns out to have been with us all along. It seems that the dialectic both required the difference between the two moments of consciousness in order to arrive at its fundamental unity and, similarly, the qualitative distinction between phenomenological consciousness and natural consciousness, in order for the progression of

the latter to be scientific from the outset. The reversal of consciousness is the point or stage of the progression at which it realizes that phenomenological consciousness inheres within natural consciousness all along. The Absolute itself is inherent in each shape of consciousness. Absolute knowing is the 'end' of philosophy in Hegel, but also, as we have just explained, it is also the 'beginning'

Hegel believed that through the dialectical 'method', consciousness would be able to capture its own essence and that

"... it may purify itself for the life of the Spirit, and achieve finally, through a completed experience of itself, the awareness of what it really is in itself." (PS977)

The question of the end of philosophy is not *answered* in Hegel's phenomenology but *opened up*. By showing that what philosophy took to be its telos, the True (or Truth), to be the constant and fundamental property of thought (and which is "just as much substance as subject") Hegel leaves us not with an answer but with all the work of thinking to be done. This is to be understood in two senses: firstly, as Hegel stresses, that the ladder to the Absolute is not something that can be demonstrated or accounted for prior to the commencement of *our own* ascent. This means we cannot

know before we bring this knowing into being: knowing is not a thing but an act - we must do it. Secondly, the completion (Vollendung) of metaphysics is an essential issue for dialectical thinking because of what we could call the 'revenge' of natural consciousness. We have indicated how the reversal of consciousness is the crucial moment in which it learns of its progress and its orientation to the Absolute: the condition for the truth of each shape of consciousness is phenomenological consciousness, which knows itself other than by means of reflection. What about the fact that at the moment of reversal "we" too make an object of this otherwise non-thematic consciousness? Indeed if we did not do this then we could not talk about it, nor assign it a central role in Science, nor represent it in any way whatsoever. This does not in fact contradict Hegel's account of consciousness: what it indicates is that "our contribution", which is "pure apprehension" does not become an object of consciousness as such - what happens when we attempt to think it is that a new shape of consciousness arises. What "we" have before us then, on the road to Science, is never the end of philosophy qua eschaton - the Absolute itself. The Absolute is, however, proper to thought in that it is with us at each stage. This is why Hegel says that consciousness is "true in what it affirms" and "false in what it

denies". For Hegel the end of philosophy is with us and is yet to come, the relation between these two is, of course, dialectical and thought is the work of the dialectic.

The circularity implicit in the presentation of the dialectic in the Phenomenology of Spirit could be said to be the 'structure' of the Absolute. How "we" who find ourselves enclosed within this circular system, at the same moment as we discover "our" relation to the Absolute, are to respond to the necessity of our engagement, has become the issue through which we might characterize our epoch. As Michel Foucault once said,

"Whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or Nietzsche, our entire epoch struggles to disengage itself from Hegel."³.

Heidegger

Important changes occur in the course of Heidegger's thinking with regard to how he thinks the end of philosophy. These changes reflect his attempt to *accomplish* a break with metaphysical thinking and not merely describe its limits. That such changes impose themselves on Heidegger indicates the way in which the thinking of the end of metaphysics is inextricably tied up with the issue of a break with the tradition and the production of a new signification in thinking. The best way to introduce this thought here is to look at how Heidegger regards his own relation to metaphysics in the course of his analyses.

Firstly we can consider the way in which he undertakes the task of the de-structuring of the history of ontology in Being and Time (BT) §6.⁴ Like other analyses in BT this one takes the question of being (die Seinsfrage) as its "clue", the question here being understood to be proper to Dasein rather than subjectivity (Bewußtsein). The "ontological difference" (between Sein and seiendes) which places Dasein in a privileged relation to Sein, marks a point of involution in thinking such that thinking the end of philosophy is seen to be the "ownmost" possibility of

Dasein because the history of Sein is in a crucial sense the same as that of Dasein.

"The ownmost meaning of Being which belongs to the inquiry into Being as an historical inquiry, gives us the assignment (Anweisung) of enquiring into the history of that inquiry itself, that is, of becoming historiological. In working out the question of Being, we must heed this assignment, so that by positively making the past our own, we may bring ourselves into full possession of the ownmost possibilities of such inquiry." (BTS6)

This assignment is, however, problematic because the historicity of Dasein, by virtue of which it stands in this privileged relation, means that it has "no ground of its own to stand on". In other words, any historiology is, as such, a part of what Dasein attempts to scrutinize. Hence,

"Dasein simultaneously falls prey to the tradition of which it has more or less taken hold... (this tradition) blocks our access to those primordial *sources* from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part quite generally drawn." (ibid)

For Heidegger the possibility of a more originary thinking comes to the fore with the completion (Vollendung) of metaphysics. This possibility is inscribed within metaphysics because the history of Being is the same as metaphysics, and it is through

the thinking of the ontological difference that the possibility of the reappropriation of this history, by means of the de-struction of onto-theology, is grasped. At this stage the problem of freeing thought from its metaphysical framework is not simply one of discarding something, but also one of not being able to fully grasp something: the Vollendung of metaphysics in Heidegger stresses the fulfilment (Vollziehung) and not simply the end (Endung) of metaphysics. This implies that the movement toward the completion of the tradition must be an assuming of the *positive* possibilities. The 'limits' of metaphysical thinking are in no way to be thought of as an obstacle to this movement, but rather the *condition of its possibility*. The de-struction, which Heidegger undertakes is not merely a historiology; it is an attempt to respond to the directive given by that which *engenders* conceptuality but remains hidden itself, namely, the *other*. The legitimacy of making this sort of claim is based, in Heidegger, on the experience of Nothing (das Nichts), an experience he places both at the origin and at the end of metaphysics.⁵ The very essence of Dasein is a transcendence of the beingness (Seiendenheit) of beings; it occurs as a going beyond the subject matter of metaphysics. The questioning nature of Dasein indicates its assignation as a going beyond metaphysics; it is its proper pursuit. At first

Heidegger conceived his project to be the working out of a Fundamentalontologie, which was to proceed by means of existential analyses of the ontic structures of being-in-the-world. This thinking too involved a reversal in its demonstration of the priority of the ontological over the ontic. Here the relation between the two and the parallel relation between Sein/Dasein is not held to be dialectical, so the reversal is understood rather as a 'transformation' of thinking; a thinking from the 'perspective' of Being rather than beings. In contrast, dialectical thinking turns back on itself at the point of reversal only to grasp the beingness of beings; it remains wholly metaphysical - a metaphysical system merely reversed. A short digression here into Heidegger's account of this 'shortcoming' in Hegel's dialectic is in order here as it demonstrates something which forces Heidegger to reassess his own way of thinking the reversal.

The question around which Heidegger enters into a dialogue with Hegel is that of how we are to understand the "we", the "for us" and "our contribution" in relation to presence and experience.⁶ In his use of the "we" (who look on the whole system of Science) Hegel makes a distinction between appearance in experience and appearance of experience. Heidegger suggests that Hegel fails to see the full significance

of this distinction. In so far as phenomenological experience is non-representable or non-objectifiable, "we" experiencers are equally non-dialectical.⁷ We are not a higher form of consciousness, as Hegel indeed notes, but if we conclude that "we" are the experience, then the appearance of experience remains a problem. The reversal, the point at which experience turns back on itself, reveals both the absolute presence of beings (Seiendenheit), namely, what is experienced, and the absolute presence of experience. In order for the Absolute (beingness of beings) to be revealed to "us", "we" must be such that we are beings acquainted with our own beingness. The "we" signifies the relation to the Absolute in which the presence of beings can appear. The self-presentation of experience in experience, Heidegger suggests, implies that for "us" to experience the beingness of beings, "we" must be able to do so on the basis of a pre-comprehension of Being. Experience should therefore be considered the self-presentation of the Absolute qua Absolute. Hegel does not think of it in this way because the transparency of experience, which appears in the reversal, is thought of as "absolute subject"; as subjectivity qua Science. Hegel interprets what Heidegger refers to as Being as absolute self-certainty. The Heideggerian "we" 'experiences' the self-disclosure of Being, which, in the same moment,

conceals its own truth as the absoluteness of the Absolute.

The purpose of this 'critique' is not to try to give the last word on Hegel's dialectic! What we see instead is an exemplary de-structuring reading Hegel, one which attempts to think the unthought (Ungedachte) in his text. It is also an example of what was referred to in BTS6 as exploiting "the positive possibilities" of the tradition. What it demonstrates above all is the sense and extent of "our" entrenchment within the metaphysical tradition. It becomes clear that by the same necessity which reinscribes Hegel within the tradition, Heidegger's thinking, too, is held to a re-evaluation; a reinscribing of a limit. It is language (itself) which comes to be seen as the 'source' of conceptual thinking and therefore thinking always conceptualizes. The de-structuring of the history of Being cannot alone achieve the retrieval (Wiederholung) of Being and encounters its own limit as language. Having taken us to a more profound understanding of the reversal, Heidegger's thinking takes on a radically new style and an attempt to engage language in another kind of reflexivity, which we are not going to concern ourselves with here.

In the Letter on Humanism⁸ Heidegger notes that the metaphysical tradition and indeed his own thinking in BT is not only limited in that it thinks Being as a concept, but also because it "fails to recognise that there is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual"⁹ Its failure in this respect stems from the retention of an "inappropriate concern" to be "science and research". Indeed scientific thinking, for Heidegger, is the thinking which flourishes "when original thinking has come to an end". In The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking¹⁰, he says,

"... philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity." ¹¹

The empirical sciences originate in 'subjective thinking'; the unfolding of truth (understood as 'certainty') occurs within this process and the 'objective' product is proof, or demonstrates the validity of such thinking.

"The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy...This development looks like the mere dissolution of philosophy, and in truth is precisely its completion." (ibid)

Heidegger is not, of course, saying here that the natural sciences, are themselves dangerous or undesirable, but rather that we live in an epoch in which thinking comes to halt in so far as it takes truth to be that with which scientific thought is concerned. The 'danger' which is at hand with the completion of metaphysics understood in this way, is that the 'certainty' which characterizes the success of natural science will be taken for the proper object of thinking. Thinking would thus enter a kind of 'dark age'. On the other hand, as it is only by means of the completion of metaphysics that its limitations come to light, Heidegger asks:

"Is there a *first* possibility for thinking apart from the *last* (so) characterized?"¹²

An essential aspect of the task of thinking is that it participates in the completion of metaphysics. Not by imitating natural science, but as the "gathering" of metaphysics as the history of metaphysics.

"The end of philosophy is the place, that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its most extreme possibility. End as completion thus means *gathering*."¹³

For Heidegger we are in the time of this "gathering" and our epoch is to be characterized as the epoch of

the overcoming (Überwindung) of metaphysics. The exposure of metaphysics to itself as being limited is a product of the work of this gathering and Heidegger considered much of this to have been done by Nietzsche in his thinking of the reversal (see below). Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche does not consider his thinking of the reversal to be an overcoming of metaphysics, it represents rather a coming full-circle. In Nietzsche's "final position", Heidegger sees the final stage of Platonism in the form of an inversion. He thinks of Nietzsche as having taken metaphysics to its zenith, the point at which a *decision* must be made:

"...as to whether with the end of Platonism man, as he has been hitherto, has come to an end, whether he is to become that kind of man Nietzsche characterized as the *last man*, or whether that type of man can be overcome and the "overman" begin."¹⁴

Despite the greatness of Nietzsche's achievement, he remains thoroughly caught in metaphysics:

"We may not presume to stand outside metaphysics because we surmise the ending of metaphysics. For metaphysics overcome in this way does not disappear. It *returns* transformed."¹⁵

The completion of metaphysics is described in various ways by Heidegger and it is a recurrent theme in his writings. It is also important to recognise that the

completion is also the scene of his writing: "The old meaning of the word end is 'place'."¹⁶ His attempt to think the completion from within indicates his own relation to metaphysics and is a clue for our understanding of his thinking of the end of philosophy. It is not, emphatically, an historical event nor is it merely a concept within his (necessarily) conceptual thesis of the end of philosophy. Let us recap by looking at some of the ways he expresses it in The End of Philosophy.

"The decline of the truth of Being occurs necessarily, an indeed as the completion of metaphysics" (op cit p.86)

"The completion of metaphysics begins with Hegel's metaphysics of absolute knowledge as the Spirit of the will." (ibid p.89)

"With Nietzsche's metaphysics, philosophy is completed. That means: It has gone through the sphere of prefigured possibilities." (ibid p.95)

"The name *technology* is understood here in such an essential way that its meaning coincides with the term *completed metaphysics*. (ibid p.93)

"With the end of philosophy, thinking is not also at its end, but in transition to another beginning." (ibid p.96)

The task of overcoming (Wiederholung/ Überwindung) overlaps with the completion (Vollendung) of

metaphysics for Heidegger, in a way that was hidden to the thinking of BT, nevertheless, the notion of the end of philosophy marks the continuity between the two periods of his thought rather than a break. The insight Heidegger attained with regard to the limitations of the thinking of BT which led to the abandonment of the project set for "Section 3" of that work, does not mean that the thinking of the ontological difference is also abandoned in the later work. On the contrary it is precisely this which provides the insight into the 'limited' nature of metaphysics as such.

Heidegger's thinking of the reversal holds that the completion/overcoming of metaphysics is the proper object of thinking such that any anticipation of the overcoming is already engaged in thinking the relation between the two.

Nietzsche

The multiplicity of Nietzsche's styles and the scattered fragments of the 'themes' of his thinking, throughout his work, would make it an impossible task even to attempt a brief discussion of his 'thesis' of the end of philosophy, were it not for the fact that at certain points he chooses to represent his ideas with the most stunning brevity. Nietzsche sees philosophy, metaphysics, as condemned to a process of repetition, constantly reorganizing the terminology by which it expresses itself, but a closed system of reference which recurs (eternally), or replays like an old record. Whether or not Nietzsche's "philosophizing with a hammer" is truly a way breaking this record we shall not try to judge here. We shall instead briefly take a look at two oft-quoted passages of his, in order to make a cursory examination of how he understands this repetition to be occurring, and how it manifests itself. The first passage is from Twilight of the Idols (TWI)¹⁷, the second from Beyond Good and Evil (BGE)¹⁸. In a section in TWI entitled "How the Real World Became a Myth", Nietzsche summarizes the entire history of philosophy in six stages. In that summary, comprising a mere 1½ pages, he describes how in the history of philosophy since Plato, for whom the "real" world was

accessible, there has been an "inversion" of thinking, such that the real world has been "abolished". Philosophy, by means of an apparently dialectical progression, has moved through an essentially predetermined set of possibilities, in a somewhat circular manner, and arrived back at its 'original' position, but in an inverted form. To this extent we could say that this model bears some resemblance to Hegel's dialectic: the completion of philosophy is seen as an 'inversion' (or reversal) in which the 'end' is reinscribed in the 'beginning'. In BGE Nietzsche puts it thus:

"That individual philosophical concepts are not anything capricious or autonomously evolving, but grow up in connection and relationship with each other; that, however suddenly and arbitrary they seem to appear in the history of thought, they nevertheless belong just as much to a system as all the members of the fauna of a continent - is betrayed in the end also by the fact that the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies... Their thinking is, in fact, far less a discovery than a recognition, a remembering, a return,...a kind of atavism." (BGE §20)

Nietzsche is also similar to Hegel in so far as he does not seek merely to describe our ensnarement within this cycle in the form of a history, but to attain a thinking which thinks through a reflection of a different 'order'; which would not be merely another

stage of historical becoming. This is clear in that in "How the Real World Became a Myth", the history of philosophy from 'beginning' to 'end' (qua reversal/inversion) is presented in the first five stages. Stage six, the age of Zarathustra, with which Nietzsche identifies his own thinking, inaugurates the attempt to think from the perspective of the completion of metaphysics. Nietzsche's critique of philosophy is far from systematic, therefore any systematic representation of what he is attempting to accomplish tends to detract from its force. Indeed 'attack' is a better word than critique; like a terrorist he attacks the establishment, mocking its authority, refusing to take its 'highest achievements' seriously, disrupting the system by adopting different disguises through changes of style. Sometimes he is so successful at this that he is regarded with contempt by traditional philosophers! But before we consider what Nietzsche might be doing by adopting such a (multiple) style, let us look at how he perceives the necessity by which philosophy is secretly disposed to repeat itself. For this we return to BGES20, where he describes it in the following way:

"The strange family resemblances of all Indian, Greek and German philosophising is explained easily enough. Where there is an affinity of languages, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar - I mean owing to the

unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions - that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems..." (My emphasis)

Nietzsche is suggesting a complicity between conceptualisation and language, such that the normative value of intelligibility and conceptual thought become essentially identified in philosophy. What we see in these two passages from Nietzsche is an account of the reversal in which Nietzsche encounters language as the 'horizon' or limit from which any future thinking must begin. In Nietzsche, as in Hegel and Heidegger, no simple distinction is to be made between the 'thesis' regarding the end/completion of philosophy and the account of 'overcoming' the philosophy that each of their respective theses refers to. It is fundamental to each of them that they, of necessity, must respond to the peripherality that their 'end-theses' reflexively define, rather than assume a meta-logical or external relation. I am describing their relation to one another in this way not to reduce their respective theses to a general thesis, but to indicate how what they have in common constitutes a kind of 'sub-tradition'; the scene of the question about the end of philosophy. A certain philosophical opening in which their differences can be meaningfully explored. It is through the notion of 'eternal return'

that Nietzsche could be said to be both bringing metaphysics to its close and at the same time making a 'break' with it. In a moment I shall examine some of the different ways in which Nietzsche expresses this 'idea'. Of course my representation of this notion here is an outline of an interpretation. I make this rather obvious remark here not merely to apologise in advance for the incompleteness of this account, but to remind us at the outset that it is precisely such notions as 'representation' and 'interpretation' (of truths or identities) that the 'eternal return' displaces.

It is by now clear that each of the three thinkers I have briefly looked at, for whom the *end of philosophy* is an issue, are in a certain way responding to a paradox: metaphysics (which is necessarily conceptual thinking) is a closed system of reference which bars its own way from thinking the Absolute, Being, or whatever name one might give to *the other*. And yet the thought of the otherness of this other prevails and always already supplements metaphysics, and in some sense refuses subjection to any concept. Nietzsche's eternal return embodies this paradox: it both accounts for the structural limitation of metaphysics; for the impossibility of a signification other than the metaphysical, and yet thinks this limit as the

'condition' for an "affirmation". Affirmation as amor fati - to love the eternal recurrence of the same as our fate and thereby become "overmen". Of course the question as to how we are to understand this is inseparable from the question of the relation between metaphysics and its other, because, by virtue of the paradox itself, the expression and determination of any 'meaning' constitutes the return of metaphysics. This is the "greatest weight"¹⁹ that the thinker qua overman must bear, and whose task it is to bear.

The doctrine of Zarathustra, eternal recurrence, has two components corresponding to the two horns of the paradox as I have just described it. Firstly, it is the basis for a sustained attack on the metaphysical tradition and secondly, it is equally the basis for a transvaluative transformation of thinking (i.e. metaphysics) toward a "higher principle", namely that of the overman or amor fati. Clearly the first would carry no force if it were not to some extent part and parcel of the second; straightforward criticism of metaphysics is straightforwardly metaphysical. Having to use the language of metaphysics carries with it the danger of naively reaffirming traditional values and privileges. To avoid this Nietzsche's 'criticism' of metaphysics must avoid becoming another formulation of a critical (i.e. metaphysical) position. In certain

places Nietzsche formulates in a theoretical kind of way an account of language which, in the rest of his work, he attempts to be faithful to, thereby demonstrating his understanding of the nature of language and, at the same time, the 'transformative' character of what he is doing in a concrete way. An example of the first is to be found in the essay "Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense"²⁰. Here Nietzsche begins, in a seemingly similar way to Hegel in the introduction to The Phenomenology of Spirit, by criticising the concept of cognition. However, we soon come to realize that it is not 'cognition-as-an-instrument' or indeed cognition as anything that he specifically objects to, but cognition in general, which is understood always to be, ultimately, of some absolute identity (even when this is thought of as a Hegelian sublated 'identity' of identity and difference). He then goes on to explain why there is no 'standard' by which to measure cognition which is not essentially anthropocentric, and that to postulate the existence of any such standard, even in relation to the logic of dialectic, is to open the way for the 'return' of the in-itself. He describes how the thought that language is capable of expressing truth, or that thought is a progression toward truth (and the two always go hand-in-hand), is itself an effect of language. Firstly he asks:

"Whence...arises the impulse to truth? As far as the individual tries to preserve himself against other individuals, in the natural state of things he uses the intellect in most cases for dissimulation; since however, man both from necessity and boredom wants to exist socially and gregariously, he must endeavour to make peace...The first conclusion of peace brings with it a something which looks like the first step toward the attainment of that enigmatical bent for truth. For that which henceforth is to be 'truth' is now fixed; that is to say, a uniformly and valid binding designation of things is invented and the legislature of language also gives the first laws of truth; since here, for the first time, originates the contrast between truth and falsity". 21

What is important in this answer, which provides a genealogical account of the use of language and the notion of truth, is not the empirical validity of its claims; whether or not certain developments actually happened, but that it makes clear that any history, political, sociological, economic etc., must already, in its assertion of precisely such a value, have assumed the truth which its explanation endeavours to represent; it must have assumed the neutrality of that truth with respect to language.

Nietzsche's point is that how we view language, and what we believe it to be capable of doing, necessarily has a bearing on the way in which we interpret the phenomenon; our view of language is integral to our

understanding of the world we 'give ourselves'. Furthermore, there are only 'interpretations' of this kind, and not good or bad representations of an (independently) true reality.

"Only by means of forgetfulness can man ever arrive at imagining that he possesses 'truth' in that degree just indicated...As certain as no one leaf is exactly similar to any other, so certain is it that the idea 'leaf' has been formed through an arbitrary omission of these individual differences, through a forgetting of the differentiating qualities, and this idea now awakens the notion that in nature there is besides the leaves, something called the 'leaf'..." 22

In a similar manner and more important with regard to philosophical discourse, is the reification of such guiding conceptual oppositions as subject/object, fact/value, existence/essence etc. It is the relation between such key notions which "unconsciously" structures and determines the character of metaphysical thinking. By the same control, thinking suffers a limitation such that metaphysics eternally repeats itself, in one form or another, but essentially as the same.

We encounter the 'end of philosophy' in Nietzsche not in terms of telos or eschaton, but in terms of the radical displacement of these; a rejection of being in favour of becoming. With this doctrine of eternal

return, Nietzsche foresaw the "end of the longest error" and the transformative power that such a doctrine possessed. The end of philosophy as the "end of the longest error" coincides with the possibility of affirmation and amor fati, as exemplified in the thinking of Zarathustra, in whom "all opposites are blended into a new unity."

The thinking of Zarathustra implies some form of sublation (Aufhebung), but not one which constitutes a logical progression which progresses by means of a series of contradictions. We remember that his account of language suggests that any persisting identity, which would act as the foundation of such a progression is an "illusion" created by language. The "inversion" of philosophy, which we saw in How the Real World Became a Myth, is thought of as philosophy "overcoming itself" (sich selbst aufhebende). What this means for Nietzsche, he both describes and effectively demonstrates in his writing. It involves philosophizing in such a way as to take into account the fact that language can no longer be regarded as a means for revealing truths about man and the world; it involves responding to the fact that such notions as 'man' and 'world' can no longer be held to refer to anything independent of the thought and language in which they 'appear'.

The Notion of a *Limit-Text* and its Deconstruction

What has emerged from our brief examination of the thinking of the end of philosophy in the three thinkers Hegel, Heidegger, and Nietzsche is that the thought of the *end* cannot proceed simply as a second-order reflection; a kind of branch of philosophy, or a meta-philosophy. Each of these discourses is to be distinguished from those which are *straightforwardly* 'within' the tradition by an extra fold of reflexivity which discovers an essential *opacity* at the heart of thinking rather than the usually assumed translucency. Each encounters *the other* and finds it (to be) other than metaphysics can represent to itself. The discovery of this other coincides with metaphysics' own realisation of its *limited* nature. What we here refer to as a limit-text is one which could be said to distinguish itself from the tradition by responding maximally to the limit character of metaphysics. This need not imply the theoretical accounting for this limit and therefore does not only apply to texts which directly address the issue of the limit in saying what they say: 'involvement' with the limit could be equally unconscious. The general process of deconstruction, to which we are now going to address ourselves, spans the

distinction between conscious reflection on the end of philosophy and an unconscious *involvement* in it. We are therefore treating the term deconstruction²³, in its most general sense, as a reference to the *something which happens* in the text, vis a vis the end of philosophy, and beyond the distinction between what belongs to the text itself and its external interpretation.

We are going to look now at the theory/practice of deconstruction as it is developed in the thinking of Jacques Derrida, because, as will become clear later, this thinking will be one of our ways of access to the Levinasian texts we deal with in the following chapters. Before we do that directly, let us first reflect on the genealogy of deconstruction in Heidegger and Nietzsche.

We have already noted that in Heidegger the activity of *questioning* related to the ontological priority of Dasein, is an aspect of the de-structuring of the metaphysical tradition. In this, whatever is taken to be characteristically determinative of the tradition as such will be the focus of the de-struction. The traditional inquiry into the quiddity of what is, is therefore itself an issue.

"In so far as a thinker sets out to experience the ground of metaphysics, in so far as he sets out to recall the truth of Being itself instead of really representing beings as beings, his thinking has in a sense left metaphysics."²⁴

What is important for us here is to appreciate the sense in which the analytic of Dasein by which this de-structive inquiry proceeds is not to be thought of as a philosophical method but belongs to the "ownmost possibility" of Dasein. It is not simply a phenomenology which thinks in terms of a single moment of immediate presence, but refers already to the historicity of Dasein. This de-structuring thinking represents the possibility for Dasein to grasp its own essential relation to the historicizing of history (weltgeschichtliches Geschehen).²⁵ It is thus proper to authentic Dasein to occur as a de-structuring of the tradition which effectively hides from it the "primordial sources" to which it has privileged access by virtue of its ontological priority. Dasein traditionally derives the meaning of being from secondary sources and worse, forgets their secondary nature. Heidegger attempts to put thinking back on the path to the reappropriation of the originary sources by means of a de-struction of "decisive"²⁶ moments in the history of philosophy at which the meaning of Being has been decisively hidden. That this was later perceived to necessarily involve the thinking of a new relation

to (the being of) language did not affect this basic insight, namely, that the relation to the other qua Being is to be approached through the privileged status of Dasein in the ontological difference. The destructive reading reveals the decisive withdrawal of Being, for example, as it does in Heidegger's reading of Hegel, to which we referred earlier. There the withdrawal of Being is marked by Hegel's thinking of the Absolute as absolute subjectivity. This is the point at which the ontological difference is decisively dissimulated.

Nietzsche's views on the nature of language and its role in relation to the repeated "filling in of possible philosophies" (BGE20), although very different from Heidegger's, have also been a major influence on Derrida's notion of Deconstruction. In particular, perhaps, as they are expressed in the following:

"What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions...and by this very unconsciousness, by this very forgetting (one) arrives at a sense of truth."²⁷

Philosophy is therefore on a false footing if it proceeds as if language were essentially that by which the world and its contents were denominated. Nietzsche is here challenging the ability of language to denominate and at the same time the existence of any self-identical entities which might be denominated. The notion *literal truth* is thereby rejected and along with it any notion of its opposite - *absolute metaphoricity*. Instead of language either meaning what it says or being meaningless, language functions as a relational or wholly differential and interwoven totality, to which Nietzsche gives the name Will to Power. It is not our intention to go into some kind of comparative evaluation of philosophies which make *language* the issue at the end of philosophy as such. What we do seek to represent is the sense in which the issue becomes one of how thinking should respond to this revelation of language, and what it 'means' or signifies. Derrida both theorizes about the situation of language divorced from the transcendental signified and seeks also to demonstrate its consequences textually. In this he takes over much from Nietzsche's thinking of the Will to Power which makes of language a differential field of force. In Nietzsche this differential totality appears through its myriad representation in metaphor, but the dominant metaphor in Nietzsche used for its expression is that of force.

Force can be thought traditionally and mechanistically in terms of entities and bodies but it also lends itself to an interpretation in terms of relationality and differentiability.²⁸ Derrida sees in this an example of where traditional thinking, or, the traditional 'metaphoricity' begins to deconstruct itself and therefore a point where the thinker can best direct his energies in moving this deconstruction on. Formally it involves in the first instance, a reversal of the traditional priority of, in this example, the metaphor of the identities of forces over their differentiability. What happens here is that metaphysics perceives its metaphysicality in terms of the limit. It therefore indicates the possible opening on another signification and the beyond of metaphysics. However, thought cannot by means of this reversal simply move to think the condition of its possibility, which it must do to break free of metaphysics. It cannot do this because it must think this *condition* otherwise than in the conceptual framework of the tradition. The ensnarement within metaphysics becomes apparent in the same moment as metaphysics discovers itself to be the desire to break from it - it cannot simply give up trying to think this *condition* in terms of a *making present*. For Derrida the recapture of Heidegger's, Hegel's, and Nietzsche's thinking by metaphysics should be understood to occur as a further 'refold' of the metaphysics of presence,

the very 'folding' of which released their own respective insights into the thought of the end of philosophy in the first place. The very thought of a reflexivity that might facilitate the "twisting free" from metaphysics is itself an essentially metaphysical thought. Taking the absolute *differentiality* of language as his clue Derrida, seeks the deconstruction of the "greatest totality"²⁹. In his work Derrida addresses thinkers whose own work implicitly or explicitly reverses the traditional priority of identity over difference and in which the mark of a more profound differentiality is to be traced.

"There may be a difference even less conceivable than the difference between Being and beings. Of course, it could not be named as such in our language. Beyond Being and beings, this difference, which would differentiate and defer (itself) incessantly, would also trace (itself); such a difference would be the first or last trace - if we could still speak here of origin or end...This difference already suggests a mode of writing (*écriture*) without presence and absence - without history, cause, *archè*, or *telos*, which would overturn all dialectic, theology, teleology, and ontology. This mode of writing would exceed everything that the history of metaphysics has conceived in the form of the Aristotelian *grammè*, the point, the line, the circle, as well as time and space themselves."³⁰

The theory and practice of this Writing Derrida proposes philosophy undertake at the end of philosophy, are not to be distinguished; they exemplify one another. Writing is thus the attempted deferral of the recapture of the text by metaphysics. It is in this sense a 'strategy' but one without a telos. It represents thus more than the mere recognition of the completion of philosophy; it is already in the moment of the deferment, a transformative move. It takes thinking at the end of philosophy into the closure (clotûre) of metaphysics. The transformative phase of strategic deconstruction's intervention in this closure employs a diverse multiplicity of textual devices in an attempt to ceaselessly reorganise the "sites of our questioning"³¹. It unloosens and unstitches the metaphysical text from the inside and hatches like a cuckoo egg that has always already been nested in metaphysics. Once hatched this cuckoo can edge out arch-concepts such as the transcendental signified, identity, presence etc. This fundamental *differantiality* permits the deployment of certain deconstructive agents, which are neither simply words nor concepts, to play a vital role in preventing the work from equally being either 'recaptured' by metaphysics or collapsing into the *neutrality*³² of utter meaninglessness. *Difference*, for example, does not replace the notion of being. The *trace*, which slips

into discourse when the transcendental signified slips out "does not name anything, it has no identity". Certain traditional terms become particularly highly charged with transformative energy at the interface between the metaphysical text and the limit-text.³³ They are for that reason particularly subversive in the hands of the deconstructivist. For example amongst those used by Derrida in various places are hinge (brisure), which both breaks and joins, pharmakon, which both poisons and cures, the hymen - a symbol of purity and of the desire for penetration. Such "indecidables" and a general indecidability with regard to the text, strategically maintain the fluidity and dynamism of de-centered discourse as it distances itself from the inherited conceptuality.

"It is not a question of junking these concepts, nor do we have the means to do so. Doubtless it is more necessary, from within semiology, to transform concepts, to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little to modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations..."³⁴

We have already noted that Derrida's strategy has two moments: the first corresponding to the reversal of metaphysical hierarchies and the second to the transformative phase in which a new concept of Writing (écriture) continues the work of deconstruction. It is

the interweaving of these two strategies, says Derrida, that achieves the maximal immunity from metaphysical 'recapture'; the risks associated with either in isolation are minimalised. Derrida strongly associates the first moment of this strategy with Heidegger, in whom 'immanent critique', as Heidegger himself calls it and calls for in The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking, runs the risk of reinscribing the value *presence*.³⁵ The second moment of the strategy, which refers to the decision to "change ground, in a discontinuous and eruptive manner, by stepping abruptly outside and by affirming absolute rupture and difference", taken in isolation would run another kind of risk: of not saying anything at all, having broken with the minimum requirement of communicative discourse. The second position he associated with French philosophy of the late 1960's. This was a measure of the greater influence of Nietzsche than Heidegger in France at that time.³⁶ Derrida himself has one foot firmly in the Heideggerian camp and he does not in any case associate the second moment strategy in isolation with Nietzsche. In Spurs³⁷ he clearly associates the kind of interweaving he theorizes about with the Nietzschean text. In his own work he attempts to demonstrate that the thought of another signification coincides in our *epoch* with the coming to the fore of difference - the mere trace of *differance* - and that this is what

'shakes' metaphysics, disturbing its sedimented conceptuality, opening discourse to the possibility, for once, of not taking the dross of re-sedimentation but instead the gold of....?"" We shall close this section with a citation of *differance*, it is also a quote from an essay, *Differance*, by Jacques Derrida.

"*differance* is neither a *word* nor a *concept*. In it, however, we shall see the juncture - rather than the summation - of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what has conveniently been described as our 'epoch': the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of neurone facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace in Levinas, and the ontological difference in Heidegger."""

The Inside/Outside and its *Significance*

When we talk about the *ends* of philosophy, overcoming metaphysics, 'going beyond' metaphysics; when we find that there is no question of abandoning metaphysics or taking a step outside, because there is no meta-language in which a new way of thinking could proclaim itself, we are always at the same time as we formulate our questions with regard to the signifying of this other signification, asking about the relation (itself) between metaphysics and its other. We have seen in our survey of the thinking of the end of philosophy that the thinking of the *other* in the limit-text is reflected in the strategy, way, or method, adopted. This in turn reflects what is understood to be crucially determinative in the recapture by metaphysics of any discourse which seeks to hold out against it. Derrida's own strategy, as we have described it so far, in terms of the reversal of metaphysical oppositions and the transformative manipulation of the energy released in this reversal, leads him to formulate a theory as to the production of texts and alongside that he proposes and uses a series of textual practices aimed at moving thought into the closure of metaphysics. This philosophical enterprise is to delay

the recapture of the text by metaphysics and thereby produce an *opening*. Within this deconstructive textual production there emerges a view of how the relation between the inside and the outside of metaphysics itself reflexively functions in relation to the movement of deconstruction. This is precisely the fold of reflexivity that has no meta-language in which it might express itself: nor can it be expressed before it happens in theory and after it happens in terms of observation and description - *it happens in the Writing itself* and, allegedly, independently of any authorial control. Bearing in mind this transformed view of Writing as a differential field in which the identity of what is undecidable, we should read the oblique line between the inside/outside of metaphysics as the mark of this undecidability. Derrida himself marks this undecidability by the phonic play on et/est in the two section headings in his essay Linguistics and Grammatology, "The Inside and the Outside" and "The Inside is the Outside"⁴⁰. There is in Derrida's account of the inside/outside - an account scattered across a number of texts - a sustained undecidability corresponding to the two moments of his strategic deconstruction. On the basis of this duplicity he produces *multiple readings* of the the text at hand, which demonstrate both the decisive movements in the text, by which it attempts to overcome metaphysical

control, and also the points where that control re-asserts itself. What might be called Derrida's *own* version of the inside/outside is a function of his interweaving of the two strategies of immanent critique and continuous change of site, played out at the level of the signifier. For such thinking, what was taken to be the *other* of metaphysics is no longer thought in terms of an absolute alterity; a transcendental signified; otherness *as such*. Otherness *as such* is understood to be an effect of language here. The issue then becomes one of accounting for the *otherness within* metaphysics. Any attempt to express the significance (meaning) of the alter-signification without taking into account the *other-within* structure governing the 'appearance' of this other, in metaphysics, will either naively reinscribe metaphysical control (by submitting to it) or speak nonsense.

Heidegger had prepared the ground for the questioning of the inside/outside relation by simply pointing out that metaphysics occurs as a going beyond itself. In his own thinking this is to be seen in the reflexivity of Da-sein; it lies at the centre of his understanding of thought qua *questioning* and in the account of the ontological difference. As was to be seen in the quotation from Difference above, Derrida finds the problematical inside/outside coming to the fore

(consciously or otherwise) in the thinking of Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure and Levinas too. In so far as the relation between the inside and the outside can be represented, it is also perhaps⁴¹ wholly metaphysical. It is the very Undecidability of another signification at the end of metaphysics which refuels the thinking of the end, thus keeping in play together both the thought of the limit and the excess which undermines any conceptual grasp of the limit, for example as *horizon, time, language, otherness, intelligibility*, etc., . Such a strategy is intended to maintain a kind of openness to the *other* signification without *deciding* its nature (ie theorizing about it). Thinking about the inside/outside, we are in "an extremely complex logic", says Derrida⁴², and no theory can "substitute for the textual work required to demonstrate it". The "textual work" is the work of sustaining Undecidability vis a vis the text. Paradoxically this "sustaining" would appear to involve an inescapable element of authorial control⁴³. Authorial control is to be found in at least two forms, firstly, and quite straightforwardly, in the form of advice as to how the text should, and more often how it should not, be read. After all, any writer not seeking a posthumous audience has an interest in encouraging his readers in this way. The other form of authorial control in Derrida is, however, of a different and more

significant nature. It is not what might ordinarily be called 'authorial' control but we give it that name because it involves a certain structural intentionality of the text which, although it does not take the form of 'vocal' intervention, still plays the same role and has the same function. If this is true then its presence in *Writing*, as Derrida has given us to understand it, must be questioned. This control is to be found in the element of 'running commentary' in the form of theorizing what is going on in the text *as it is happening*. Such theorizing is never merely one reading of the many 'readings' given in a deconstruction. What is in fact going on in such instances in the Derridian text is best understood in terms of the conscious interweaving of the two moments of the strategy discussed above; of the combination of the reversal of controlling oppositions and abrupt changes of the site of the enquiry. In his essay Violence and Metaphysics⁴⁴ Derrida reminds of "the necessity of lodging oneself in the tradition in order to destroy it", all along maintaining ones awareness of ones own vulnerability to logocentric contamination. On one level Derrida can be seen to be taking the first moment of the strategy, namely, the adoptive rather than the manipulative relation to the reigning conceptuality, quite literally. That is to say, that without the supplementary *theoretical* voice; the *philosophical*

voice; the *transcendental* voice, the deconstructive discourse would slip into nonsense. It would be an abandonment of metaphysics; it would pretend to be a discourse of the *outside qua outside*, and even worse, it would be blind to the fact that this very pretence is merely a distraction, a game, whose definition was determined in advance by metaphysics. We are not suggesting here that Derrida's *primary* understanding of "the necessity of lodging oneself in the tradition" is that of the necessity of theorizing, and even less that of some kind of textual harmonizing with the 'transcendental voice'. This is not our suggestion not least because one can find in Derrida the most detailed arguments for understanding theoretical and transcendental texts within a more general account of textual production which is capable of explaining their own claims to primacy. We have expressed this thought here in these terms because it enables us express for the first time our reservations with regard to a certain *neutrality*: Is not this interweaving of two strategies a holding together of metaphysics and therefore a 'leaving everything as it is', in the belief that this is the role of the thinker at the end of philosophy? Is not this very thought of holding together predetermined to be our understanding of the *necessity* by which metaphysics occurs as such, when the crisis of thinking is defined in advance as being

suspended in the abyss between theoretical excellence and mysticism; is it not a moment of the *same* metaphysics, and therefore a refusal of the *truly other*? It is with this thought as a kind of parameter that we offer the reading of Levinas to be found in the following chapters. Before we move on to that let us consider further how we might understand the interwoven theoretical claims about what the 'practice' of deconstruction is doing, in Derrida's readings of the limit-text and its bearing on the thinking of the inside/outside.

The alternatives, we suggest, are the following: we could regard this theorizing as being consistent with general deconstructive principles in that it is a supplementary text and part of what holds the text together as such and therefore a trace of the within-metaphysics character of the particular limit-text in which it occurs. Or, on the other hand, and again consistent with what the deconstructive reading aims to demonstrate, we could regard such theorizing as the measure of a text's latent metaphysicality. This latter, however, is surely not to be expected in Derrida's readings given that all along he goes to extraordinary lengths to preserve his texts from a simple metaphysical reading: we would not expect to encounter their metaphysicality in such a blatant form.

In fact in both of these alternatives, his theorizing would be either a relatively insignificant sub-text, given the scope of deconstruction, or, in the second alternative, an actual hinderance to the aim of deferring metaphysical recapture. We see here a 'problem' in Derrida's deconstructive approach to the Inside/Outside, but do not wish to suggest that it fails in its objective, which is to articulate the thought of the necessity by which the alter-signification's appearance is determined by the *other-within* structure of metaphysics. The problem is with regard to Derrida's own understanding of how logocentric control operates. In many places he is quite explicit about what it consists in, namely, in relation to *presence*, which presents itself as both the source of metaphysics and its ultimate value: metaphysics is primordially the *metaphysics of presence*.

"Phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as *presence*, with all the sub-determinations which depend on this general form and which organise within it their system and their historical sequence (presence of the thing to sight as *eidos*, presence as substance/essence/existence (*ousia*), temporal presence as the point *stigma*) of the now or the moment (*nun*), the self-presence of the *cogito*, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego, and so forth.⁴⁵

This says that the conceptual framework of metaphysics is organised and controlled by the arche-concept *presence*. It is the general privilege of this concept that deconstruction seeks to undermine. Our point here is that Derrida needs to be duplicitous in seeking both to describe metaphysics in its manifold manifestations of presence and at the same time denying the veracity of any such historical determination of presence as such. And if this duplicity is a form of 'double-writing', then is it not, given the intentionally cautious defence of the deconstructive reading against recapture, in danger of being a strategy whose meaning has always been determined in advance? This criticism suggests that Derrida's understanding of metaphysics relies too heavily on there being something like *presence*, which, if this were true, would be no more 'controllable' by deconstructive indetermination than it is by metaphysical determination. Derrida's controlled manipulation of the controlling discourse requires both the perfection of that control within metaphysics, in order to be able to identify metaphysics as the *metaphysics of presence*, and its imperfection, in order to represent it as a repressed system on the basis of have identified the controlling force. Writing as if one could suspend one's own disbelief in concepts necessitates a high degree of control which in turn requires and implies a thematic

grasp of what is essentially metaphysical, namely presence. In other words, in order to be able to undertake the strategy Derrida proposes one has to take presence seriously; one has to make the entirely metaphysical move of identifying presence in its historical determinations as the centre of metaphysical discourse. And it is not clear that such a move can escape the charge that it relies too heavily on a metaphysical conception of metaphysics.

We are suggesting that the control which Derrida attempts to exert over the reading of his strategic manoeuvres is neither an innocent aid to the reader nor innocent of metaphysical complicity with metaphysics, as he openly admits in the following:

"We would have to show why the concepts of production, like those of constitution and of history ...remain in complicity with what is in question."⁴⁶

Clearly this complicity cannot be suspended by means of a double-bluff (ie suspended disbelief in concepts). On what basis could we distinguish between *suspended* disbelief and *pretended* disbelief? Furthermore, we suggest that although the deconstructive strategy enables us to see better than ever the extremity of the control which metaphysics exerts over some (as yet unthinkable) broader notion of *thinking*, due to its own

thematic representation of itself to itself as the *metaphysics of presence*, it thinks this closure of metaphysics by subjecting the absolutely other to the same metaphysics. What is the meaning of the thought of a 'broader notion' of thinking or metaphysics which 'governs' this deconstruction and under which it might be subsumed? With this question in mind, in the final introductory section of this chapter and in the rest of this thesis, we present the following reading of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas.

Levinas' reading of Descartes Third Meditation and the notion of ethical metaphysics.

One thought dominates the entirety of Levinas' thinking: the thought of the Infinite. So extraordinary is this thought within philosophy that we should perhaps hesitate before designating it as (a) thought at all. This suggestion is not as outrageous as it sounds if it is true that 'we' are designated by it before it is thought at all, as Levinas attempts to show. The thought of the other (autre) is wholly philosophical, it belongs to philosophy, to ontological metaphysics, but metaphysics is primordially inspired by the Infinite. Levinas retains the word "metaphysics", but in doing so implies that the finite thought of philosophy (ontological metaphysics) is inspired by the Infinite; inspired by something which it does not think, but nevertheless signifies. Levinas uses the term "metaphysics" and at the same time calls us to the absolutely other, the Other (autrui). Within his own thesis he therefore names the Other as such, but the general gesture or movement within Levinas' thesis is not one of denomination. It is on the contrary a de- denomination of the thinking subject and the making of it a pure accusative - a purely "ethical" response to the Other⁴⁷ (Autrui). This is an *anarchic*

obligation; an obligation always already taken on, engendered in an originary 'response' to the face of the other person.⁴⁷ Philosophy likewise will be found to be a (necessary) response to an older "ethical metaphysics", another signification.

Levinas' philosophy attempts to break with the tradition which he regards as a "destruction of transcendence"⁴⁸. In doing so he must transcend the very distinction between immanence and transcendence. The word "transcendence" as it is retained in his work and referred to the Other, is intended to take on a meaning outside of the traditional couple by means of which it is traditionally thought. Derrida, as we have seen formalizes such a move sometimes, as the first stage of *deconstruction*. Levinas uses the term the same to designate the totality of thought from which no thought can escape in the direction of the Other and also understands it to coincide with the thought of being - ontological metaphysics. We shall see below what weight the term comes to bear in his account and not therefore pursue a definition of it at this point. It is because Levinas sees in modern philosophy a "destruction of transcendence" at the same time as presenting his critique as the rejection of a thinker such as Heidegger, who himself radically questions the role of the subject/object distinction in philosophy and the entire conceptuality that comes along with it, that he

is likely, on first reading, to be taken to be seeking a reversal of this trend by reasserting metaphysical oppositions. However, Levinas sets out to describe how of necessity philosophy lives as the thought of the same, but as a thinking which only comes to itself because it is *disturbed* by the Other (autrui)⁴⁹. Confusion as to his motives in formulating such a description revolves around his seeming to assert that the Infinite is a positive plenitude standing over against the same. It is by considering the important notion of the asymmetry of the same/Other relation, unlike the symmetry of relations between the same and others in general, that we will see quite clearly that Levinas' thinking represents a subversion rather than a reassertion of traditional oppositions and 'oppositionality' itself.

A thought which is a distancing of itself from the tradition must also be a defining or an identifying of that tradition, irrespective of whether this move is part of a conscious strategy adopted to achieve this surpassing of tradition. This tradition does have a history, indeed it is a history and this history is its being written (and re-written). Even the unwritten other of metaphysics is (not to be) found on its every page. One could therefore always re-read/write this history; always tell another story, ad infinitum. But

this ad infinitum of history, of story telling, is nothing more than a variation on a theme so long as it remains the thought of the *same* (and it is after all the same metaphysics that is in each case retold). The *history* of metaphysics' other signification is a story told by the same. It would appear that the other's story cannot be told without at the same moment being made the same; it cannot be told at all, as such, it cannot be said. Levinas calls the Other within metaphysics the *Saying*. We shall come back to this below. This notion of *the same* in Levinas is loosely synonymous with totality. The dialectic which transcends the distinction between the subject and object in the tradition is encompassed entirely within *the same* and *the same* is not thought in terms of a reciprocal negation in relation to the concept of *the other*. The place this notion does play in Levinas' account of the relation to the Other will become clear in Chapter 2.

This history of metaphysics (of the same, of ontological metaphysics) is interrupted by the thought of the Other; it is a totality interrupted by the Infinite, says Levinas. That this Infinite exceeds metaphysical determination, that despite its unthematizability it still signifies within metaphysics, inspired both Plato's notion of the Good

beyond being and Descartes Third Meditation, says Levinas, and he regards these two moments in metaphysics as being profoundly significant. They both indicate a transcendence older than the thought of transcendence itself, in so far as transcendence is a concept belonging to metaphysics.

We could say, at risk of making Levinas sound more Heideggerian than he surely is, that the reading that Levinas gives to Descartes Third Meditation recalls the notion of the Infinite from the oblivion into which it has fallen. It is easy, and perhaps not entirely false, to construe Levinas as a thinker who has partly adopted Heideggerian motifs and naively misunderstood other parts. Nevertheless, coming to Levinas from Heidegger one cannot resist the temptation to formulate provisional responses to what one finds in these terms. This is all the more ironic in view of the extensive rejection of Heidegger which Totality and Infinity (TI) represents. Heidegger certainly has a special place in Levinas' writings and plays both a 'positive' and 'negative' role, as will become apparent in our exposition.

In this section I shall look at how Levinas' reading of the Third Meditation figures in his own thinking of the end of philosophy. We shall see how this reading

permeates throughout TI and how it relates to Levinas' own thinking of the Other.

Levinas finds in Descartes the articulation of a thought of absolute alterity; the other of metaphysics cannot merely be the effect of metaphysics and metaphysical language; it cannot merely be a thought. Descartes says that the thought of the infinite cannot occur in a finite being of its own accord. For them both, being and nothing, affirming and negating, are not all of metaphysics. Descartes describes a relation between thought (ontological metaphysics) and not the unthought, but the unthinkable. The infinite is not thought through the negation of the finite.

"The idea of the perfect and of infinity is not reducible to the negation of the imperfect; negativity is incapable of transcendence." (TI 41/12)

For Levinas as for Descartes, the existent being cannot have the idea of itself before it has the idea of the infinite.

"The relation with infinity - the idea of the Infinite - as Descartes calls it - overflows thought in a wholly different sense than does opinion (i.e. subjective thought). Opinion vanishes like the wind when thought (i.e. philosophical reflection) touches it - or is revealed to be already within that thought. What remains ever exterior to that thought is thought (verb) in the idea of infinity. It is the condition

for every opinion as also for every objective truth." (TI 25/xiii) (my additions in parentheses.)

Levinas' understanding of the notion of the "overflowing" of thought is central to his conception of the tradition as a destruction of transcendence, as "totalisation"; as the reduction of the absolute Other to the same. This overflowing of thought engenders the tradition as such, it is not merely an historical contingency of the texts of Plato, Plotinus and Descartes, the thinkers to whom Levinas directs our attention as evidence for the beyond of philosophy.⁴⁹

Philosophical thought experiences a moment of inadequation between itself and the idea it has of the Infinite. The *cogito*, a thought which attempts to bracket out all thought of the other in order to attain a moment of certainty upon which all thought may be founded, finds not only that the idea of the infinite is irreducible, but that the self is inadequate to the Infinite. This inadequacy is such that the self's own self-conception as 'imperfect' is not even the imperfect form of the Infinite, for the Infinite is not a superlative self, not is it a superlative other: it is more other than other - a notion Levinas expresses sometimes by speaking of the "height" of the Other, and in one place by neologising the word 'transcendence' in

relation to height and and saying "transascendence"⁵⁰. At one point he uses the expression "higher than height" to draw attention to the fact that the concept of height does not adequately (or in any other sense) represent the relation of the Infinite to the same. This figure of "overflowing" is to be found in Levinas as guitars are to be found in the paintings of Georges Braque. And far from being the persistent restatement of an enigma, we are emphatically reminded, and nowhere is it clearer than in Descartes own meditation, that this thought begins in reasoning *par excellence* - the thought of the same, the *cogito*. Levinas describes the inadequation in relation to the Other in terms of responsibility, indeed as "infinite responsibility"; as a being guilty before the Other for a crime I did not commit. He says that thought is already a response: a response to the "first word", which is in fact a command, "you shall not commit murder"⁵¹. This command is addressed to me before I *am* me as the subject of the *cogito*. Before the Other I am a pure accusative, articulated in Levinas' later work by the expression me voici. We shall look at this in detail below.

Has not all philosophy, reason, the thought of the same always been an assimilation of the other to the same?

Is it not this very movement which represents the liberation from "opinion" as mentioned above?

"The I of knowledge is, indeed, at the same time the same *par excellence*, the very event of identification and the melting pot where all otherness transmutes itself into the same. It is the philosopher's stone of philosophical alchemy. This identification constitutes its freedom, since the I returns to itself despite any otherness that it encounters and thus no other either limits or hinders it." 52

The way in which this 'I' is identified with ontological metaphysics for Levinas and how his account of it functions in relation to the description of the ethical relation, we shall look at in the next chapter.

The necessity of preserving the terms in the relation to the Infinite and their asymmetry, and likewise the foothold which the 'I' of reason maintains within philosophical thought, is emphatically asserted in Levinas and associated with Descartes defence of the *cogito* against insanity and delirium (and also against the possible mystical interpretation of the relation he seeks to describe.) 53

"Theory excludes the implementation of the knowing being entering into the beyond by ecstasy." (TI 48/19)

This also lies at the basis of Levinas' account of the *separation* of the 'I' (see below). Similarly,

"...Representation does not constitute the primordial relationship with being. It is nonetheless privileged, precisely as the possibility of recalling the separation of the I...The knowing being remains separated from the known being. The ambiguity of Descartes' first evidence, revealing the I and God without merging them as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterises the very meaning of separation." (ibid)

"The ambiguity of Descartes' first evidence" is that it announces its secondarity to a relation always already entered into. Levinas says: "separation is not reflected in thought but produced by it" (TI 54/25). The "privilege of reflection", mentioned above, here encounters its limit. This limit, however, is not to be considered the moment in which metaphysics perceives itself to be a "useless passion", but precisely the one in which the anteriority of the relation to the Infinite in relation to thought/theory/reason comes to light. In other words, the claim is that metaphysical desire is 'older' than thought itself. This non-logical, non-chronological sequence of "events" in Levinas, inspired by Descartes, and which he refers to as the ^{53a} *anterior posteriori*; the always coming after of what is logically prior to its coming (into being), is integral to the entire metaphysics of TI. Far from being a

slipping away from, or rejection of, philosophy and history, it can be seen to mark the strongest possible commitment to them:

"The posterity of the anterior - an inversion logically absurd - is produced, one would say, only by memory or by thought" (TI 54/25)

In this thesis we shall show what form this takes in Levinas and the significance it is given (or the other way around: the signifyingness that it reveals). The thought of the Other is entirely within the realm of the philosophical, so any notion of the beyond occurs entirely within. It occurs as an interruption or disturbance of philosophical thought. We will be examining throughout the sense of the Infinite within the finite; the In-finite, as this thought is articulated in Levinas.

In the section of TI entitled "The metaphysical and the human", Levinas rehearses his conception of this relation in very religious sounding language, speaking of God, atheism, and revelation. He ends it by saying, "everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation, represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion." (TI 79/52). The section, despite its appearance on first reading, seeks to establish the non-theological character of its

subject matter, namely, the relation between the separate, or "atheist" being and the Infinite; between the metaphysician and the metaphysical. The other person is experienced as that which (he who) exceeds my conceptual determination of his existence. The relation to the other person is not a relation to an "objective existence", but to something which "overflows" all determination appropriate to objective existence. It is on the basis of an account of this separate "atheist" 'I' that Levinas presents his radical thesis that the relation of the metaphysician to the metaphysical is not originally thematization or theology, but "ethical behaviour" (TI 78/50); that "metaphysics is ethics *first*".

The atheist 'I' is not a 'consciousness' which comes to itself by means of reflection. The "taking up of existence" by the existent is described in terms of "wakefulness" and it is to be contrasted to the conscious being. The existent has a life prior to reflection, at a "level of life" at which it secures its interiority. Objectification and self-consciousness are not the product of the *encounter* with the Other in Levinas. He undertakes the task of describing the anteriority of the relation to the Other; to the (reflective) existential identification of consciousness. The existential act is late in relation

to the relation to the Other. Certainty as experienced by Descartes' *cogito* rests on the pre-reflective coincidence of the knower and the known but "the commencement of the *cogito* remains antecedent to it." For Descartes, God puts the idea of infinity in the soul, prior to this commencement. In Levinas, the awakening of the 'I' comes from its *encounter* with the Other.

"...this awakening comes from the Other. Before the *cogito* existence dreams itself, as though it remained foreign to itself. It is because it suspects that it is dreaming itself that it awakens." (TI 86/58)

The 'I' is awoken from its slumber before it is the 'I' of the *cogito*, before it is the 'I' of reflection, thematization and reason. In Levinas the encounter with the Other has always already occurred; it is in a sense prior to thought and only known to thought as a trace (c.f. Ch.3) and has *never been present* to thought, it belongs to "a past that has never been present" . For Levinas the whole of philosophy is a reductionistic gesture in so far as it reduces the Other to an idea. Even so philosophy fails to do this totally. But for philosophy not to be an "unintermitting psychoanalysis or philology or sociology" (TI 88/60) then it requires thought to somehow undo the reductionistic movement, which it

itself is, as it moves. Levinas' inspired treatment of this paradox lies in his attempt to stay with it, but not as it appears within philosophy qua *fait accompli*; as the always already done. His thought rather holds fast to what appears within the tradition as an always already *being undone* (c.f. Ch.5 below). Philosophy is necessarily, but it is not necessarily an "unintermitting psychoanalysis or philology" etc. The notion of time as a series of instants in Levinas is so important for a general understanding of him because this *being undone* does not occur in the time of identity at all (c.f.ch.2). This constitutes an attempt to wrench apart the identification of thought and language, in such a way, in such a time, as to permit language (speech/address) to interrupt thought, enabling the Other to be heard.

"Speaking implies the possibility of breaking off and beginning" (ibid).

Without this gesture philosophy is at best a stalemate and at worst genocide. The oblivion of the Other, without recourse to social anthropology, in Levinas, has everything to do with the obliteration of other men and women.

"We wish to show...how, starting from knowing identified with thematisation, the truth of this knowing leads back to the relation with the Other, that is, to justice. For the sense

of our whole effort is to contest the ineradicable conviction of every philosophy that objective knowledge is the ultimate relation of transcendence...(it) lies in affirming not that the Other forever escapes knowing, but that there is no meaning here in speaking of knowledge or ignorance, for justice, the preeminent transcendence and the condition for knowing, is nowise, as one would like, a noesis correlative of a noema." (TI 89-90/62)

The attempt to drive a wedge through thought/language is perhaps the truly philosophical alternative to silence (were silence such that it could be considered an alternative at all). Raving or madness, could also be considered a 'noisy' form of silence as this too is a form of solipsism. For such a subject the world would remain a spectacle⁵⁵. Seen from the position of the traditional conceptuality, placing a distinction between thought and language at the centre of metaphysics may appear as an act of philosophical madness. But, trying to think from the position of the tradition *being undone*, this 'inseparability' appears as a cleaving, as a 'being held together'. This apocalyptic move in Levinas is indeed an aspect of what he has in common with the other thinkers referred to earlier in this chapter, whose common ground, we have said, is their concern with the end of philosophy. The metaphors that one is variously drawn into using, and abusing⁵⁶, in order to describe the implicit philosophical gestures, are themselves very telling:

things are "turned on their head", "twisted free from", "undone", "unsaid", "interrupted", "disrupted", "cracks appear", the tradition is "shaken". Particularly apposite is a repertoire of words with double meanings to which Derrida has done more than merely bring our attention, in the style of that "delightful" word of Hegel's , Aufheben.

In this thinking, if we momentarily generalize, language has asserted itself as being its own subject and object, as both same and other. 'We', of the first person plural, are totalised by language in this thinking, but no ~~thought~~ can be said not to be subject to this condition. Levinas' attempt to distinguish the subject as first person singular from the subject as pure accusative, is a part of his attempt to give an account of language which enables not the 'I' to escape this totalization but precisely the Other. Language as spoken by the Other, as the "first word" is otherwise than thought; otherwise than *we think*.

"Absolute difference conceived in terms of formal logic is established only by language. Language accomplishes a relation between terms that breaks up the unity of genus. The terms, the interlocutors, absolve themselves from the relation, or remain absolute within the relationship. Language is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or history." (TI 195/168-9)

Language could never be restricted to or by any thesis on language. It always signifies in excess of any theme or thought that seeks to represent it, it is a solvent which dissolves its container. Levinas asks how this perpetual dissolution signifies.

"The word that bears on the Other as a theme seems to contain the Other. But already it is said to the Other, who, as interlocutor, has already quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said. The knowledge that absorbs the Other is forthwith situated in the discourse that *I address to him*. (my emphasis)...In discourse the divergence that inevitably opens between the Other as my theme and the Other as my interlocutor, emancipated from the theme that seemed for a moment to hold him, forthwith contests the meaning I ascribe to my interlocutor." (ibid)

Language is thus not denied its universality in Levinas' scission of thought and language. He seeks to describe language in such a way as to account for its signifying otherwise than as totalisation. The Other, who is not above language, breaches totality by *speaking*, and in doing so requires the intelligibility of language, which is to say that the Other signifies as a moment of the same necessity by which language *exists* :

"The formal structure of language thereby announces the ethical inviolability of the Other and, without any odor of the *numinous*, his *holiness*." (ibid)

What was described earlier in terms of a (or perhaps the) general concern of philosophy today, namely, the limited character of the traditional conceptuality and the thought of the possibility of a "new way of thinking", for which the 'end of philosophy' and the 'Inside/Outside' seem appropriate metaphors when engaging in discourse on this theme, Levinas considers in terms of the relation to the Infinite, to the Other, and calls "ethics". This is not intended to be a metaphorical displacement of this philosophical theme, but, as Levinas' thinking aims to show, it pertains to that which is anterior to thematization itself. The ethics of which Levinas speaks is not, therefore, merely one field of philosophical interest, one to which Levinas gives priority and then tries to justify this giving of priority. If this were what Levinas was doing then it would have to be said that he had failed to break with philosophy as an "unintermitting" psychoanalysis/ anthropology/ sociology etc. Levinas finds that the desire for the absolutely other which animates intellectualism and the experience of the face, are essentially interwoven in the idea of the infinite. The experience of the face of the other requires the maintenance of the asymmetry of the terms in this relation. It is on his reading of Descartes' Third Meditation that this thought is based. The finitude of the subject is accounted for in terms of

the satisfaction of need, and not through a moment of negation of the infinite. This enables the relation to the Infinite, to the Other, to be one in which the Other is not subject to representation in a theme. Contrary to Hegel, finitude is not transcended toward the infinite such that the finite is subsumed (aufgehoben) within the infinite. In Levinas' metaphysics the transcendence of the Infinite is maintained, its "height" is not diminished. The *face to face* relation is the relation in which the idea of infinity is transformed into approach - a relation to the Infinite not thought at all.

CHAPTER TWO

THEMATIZATION AND THE INTERPERSONAL

Phenomenology and Theory

It may at first seem, having surveyed the ends of philosophy scene, that the thinking which seeks to go beyond itself becomes engaged in an eternal digression about why its limits are non-transcendable and that it has abandoned one love - wisdom - for another, paradox. Reading the philosophers that we have looked at above one gets a sense of the necessity with which thought is faced with this paradox to which thinking must needs respond. The necessity of thematization can be thought, so to speak, both negatively and positively: negatively as the necessity of a limit (conceptualisation) and positively as the implication of an absolute other (a non- or pre-conceptual signifying). So, the question about thematization is not simply as to whether a philosophy is thematizing or not, for all philosophy is thematizing. It is rather one of how philosophy relates to this other. We have seen this variously described as the presence of the Absolute to dialectical consciousness, in the relation between Sein and Dasein, in Derrida's textual manipulations of the Inside/Outside, in Nietzschean antics, and lastly in Levinas' reading of Descartes in terms of an 'orientation'. It is with this last that the remainder of this thesis will be concerned.

Levinas claims never to have abandoned what he calls the 'phenomenological method', but his relationship to Husserl is far from simple. He turns against Husserl's preoccupation with theoretical considerations. Moreover, he sees in this a manifestation of the philosophical gesture *par excellence* and in what is the true target of his thesis, namely totalisation, a 'deafness' to the other qua Other. We will begin this chapter by looking at how thematization in Levinas is identified as the characteristic trait of ontological metaphysics and at the role it plays in his thesis.

The full extent to which the thematizing nature of philosophy becomes a focus of Levinas' critique of Western metaphysics and the full significance of the complicity between thematization and ontology - understood as totalisation - is expressed in his two major works TI and OTB. However, already in his doctoral dissertation of 1930, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Philosophy (THI), Levinas' criticism of Husserl is expressed in terms of his unease with the primacy afforded to theoretical consciousness and the notion of privileged forms of thematic representation.'

In Husserl, by means of the epoché, we gain access to a self-evident pre-predicative experience from which all our philosophising must begin, and upon which it must

ultimately be based. This pre-predicative experience at once marks out the horizon of thinking and constitutes itself as the thematic concern of philosophy. In so far as it is the thematic concern of philosophy, it is the subject of an intentional analysis by Husserl. What Levinas objects to is the way in which the series of reductions culminating in the transcendental reduction, is said to reveal a doxic intentionality upon which all other modes of intentionality are grounded. Intuition, in Husserl, although quite different from traditional epistemics, in that it is intentionally constitutive, still reserves priority for knowledge as the property of theoretical consciousness.

"A signifying intention only thinks about an object, but intuition gives us something of the object itself"
(THI 67/104)

The knowing is the possession of the object.

"However, merely signifying acts are not by themselves knowledge. In the purely symbolic understanding of a word, an act of meaning is performed (the word means something to us) but nothing is thereby known (Logische Untersuchungen III, 33). Knowledge will be the confirmation by an intuition of what was meant in the unfulfilled, merely signifying, intention" (THI 69/106).

Husserl's phenomenological analysis, which begins with the reduction, does not suffer from the naivety characteristic of the natural attitude, but nevertheless, at the crucial point it fails to grasp the connection between intentionality so thought and the theoretical attitude. As a result Husserl is directed away from the study of the essentially problematic nature of the pre-theoretical realm of experience, which is taken for granted, towards the epistemology of intentionality and intuitive acts. The kernel of Levinas' objection to this is expressed in the following:

"Philosophy begins with the reduction. This is an act in which we consider life in all its concreteness but no longer live it" (THI 155/210).

He goes on to say that Husserl, in his quest to make philosophy scientific and despite his privileging it among the sciences, still regards it as occupying "the same place in the destiny of man as the exercise of the theoretical sciences" (ibid). Husserl does not consider the historicity of consciousness; what we find is the exercise of a "supra-historical attitude" which is taken to support our conscious life itself. It was this disregard for the historicity of consciousness that drew Levinas toward Heidegger at this time. It is important to note that it is not on the ground of

Husserl's lack of concern with "the metaphysical destiny of man" - eschatology - that Levinas makes his reproach: he draws our attention to a straightforward phenomenological 'omission'.

"Husserl does not wonder how this 'neutralisation' of our life, which nevertheless is still an act of our life, has its foundation in life" (ibid).

Husserl's way of justifying the application of the reduction - by likening the 'free act' of reduction to Cartesian doubt - actually helps clarify Levinas on this point. What we see here is the elevation of a simple fact of consciousness, namely, that it can perform the reduction, into a methodological prerogative. This freedom "is taken as primary so that Husserl gives himself the freedom of theory just as he gives himself theory" (THI 157/222).

Levinas' relation to Husserl and to phenomenology is multi-faceted and complex. His concern with the reduction is critical with regard to Husserl's understanding of it as the method or fundamental act of phenomenological thought and yet he does not seek to dispute its centrality in thinking as such. His early remarks already indicate a concern with how 'meaning' and 'motivation' in a philosophical thesis bear upon what could be described as the philosophical gesture in

general. Levinas' reservations with regard to Husserl's account of the reduction are at this stage basically twofold. Firstly, as we have noted, he is dubious of the supra-historical attitude adopted in the analyses and secondly of the representational structure of intuition and intentionality. These two things are related in Husserl in such a way as to imply that the transcendental or theorizing subject is related to its world in the act of representation; the world being such that it is essentially representable to consciousness in theory. Language, as theory, is capable of making these representations to a neutral transcendental consciousness. By assuming its own essential possibility to be existential neutrality, the reduction also assumes that the language of theory is existentially neutral with respect to any theory of language. By disregarding the historicity of language, Husserlian phenomenology fails to consider this reciprocity. The reduction which aims to reveal 'pure experience' and a neutral 'given' at the heart of the philosophizing upon which it is based, only ever makes such a revelation within an already determinate interpretative framework. It therefore cuts us off from this 'given' at the very moment that we postulate its existence. If this is true, it could be argued, then what is needed is a reduction which is more fundamental, one which would attempt to take this

necessity into account and not assume the 'freedom of theory' just spoken of. Such a reduction would not be a reduction of the Husserlian kind because in acknowledging the necessity of starting from within the historicity of interpretative engagement one would have to maintain an awareness of the non-neutrality of the theoretical attitude. However, the spirit of the phenomenological gesture somehow haunts this alternative negatively as the dream from which philosophy has awoken, a dream which Derrida might call the dream of the full presence of the transcendental signified and its re-presentation. It may alternatively be suggested that to philosophize intending to maintain an 'awareness' of the non-neutrality of theory is merely the desire for the full presence of the signified in the form of control.² Or again, in so far as such a thinking remains akin to phenomenology, it may remain concerned with the attempt to grasp its own fundament. At the outset of Being and Time, for example, this does indeed appear to be the task of hermeneutics as it figures in relation to Fundamentalontologie. Of course, in the development of the analyses we find there, the inefficacy of the task so conceived comes to light. The internal treatment of the problems associated with theorizing, on the basis of the historicity of Dasein, effectuates a shift away from the problem of the theory as such (that is, away

from the logical problem of the relation between the predicative and the pre-predicative) toward the 'positive' acceptance of the interpretative status of all theorizing (and the theoretical status of all interpretations). Heidegger's hermeneutics thus implicitly questions the role of the very notion of fundament as it occurs in metaphysics.

In THI Levinas' criticisms of Husserl are generally aimed at exposing some of the assumptions associated with the reduction but which, if one recognises the non-simple nature of matters to which these assumptions relate (such as the relation between theorizing and the objects of theory), can be seen to militate against the 'spirit' of the reduction. In a 1940 essay on Husserl, "L'Oeuvre de E. Husserl"³, Levinas is less concerned with the possibility of refinements to the phenomenological method, which might have moved toward a 'resolution' of the paradox that inheres within it, than with a reevaluation of the significance of this paradox born of the necessity of theorizing or theoretical consciousness. It is important to understand that this necessity is thought in more general terms in the 1940 essay than it was in THI. It no longer specifically refers to the necessity by which philosophical reflection must take the form of, and thereby privilege, theoretical consciousness, such that

doxic intentionality is thought of as the fundamental mode of intentionality. Levinas extends, or rather changes his understanding of this 'privileging' so that it includes intentional consciousness in general; the whole of intentional consciousness qua *Sinngebung* and not merely analytic or reflective modes are thought of as thematizing. This was to become a key term in Levinas' characterisation of Western metaphysics, as we shall come to consider shortly. It refers here to the fact that the other, despite its noematic status, is always noetically determined by consciousness. Husserl's account of the relation between the noema and noesis "brings forward the idea of signification and intelligibility intrinsic to the content as such, of the luminosity of content..." (TI 95/68), and in so far as this is true Husserl does allow the other to appear outside the thematizing light of consciousness. On the other hand the other, despite its noematic status, remains noetically determined by the intellect and only ever appears by means of noetic representation; "it is not certain that this auto-representation in the light could have a meaning of itself" (TI *ibid*). In his reappraisal of Husserl, instead of describing the shortcomings of Husserlian intentionality, which he associates with priority of theoretical consciousness, Levinas uses Husserl in a positive way to rethink these notions in an attempt to

discover how it is that their primacy is perpetuated despite their radically new formulation and apparently different roles.

Levinas acknowledges that Husserl himself does indeed regard most acts of consciousness to be independent of theoretical or intellectual acts of reflection. This would obviously be crucial for any post-epistemological ontology based on such a thesis. Despite this, Levinas still finds the thematizing or objectifying moment to lie at the heart of Husserlian intentionality: the *Sinngebung* is a synthesising process of identification. The object is given in this act of synthesis as an ideal entity which is essentially representable. In Husserl's account of intentionality "consciousness and the world are given at one stroke", as Sartre said enthusiastically, seeing in this the final unburdening of philosophy of dualisms and epistemologies. He later devoted the essay, Transcendence of the Ego, to the defence of this early Husserl (with which he was acquainted, incidentally, largely through Levinas' book) against the later transcendentalist Husserl. If we think in the most general historical terms then Husserl's intentionality is correctly to be regarded as a break with the traditional metaphysics of the relation between the subject/object or same/other. Any interpretation of Husserl, however, which attempted to

adopt Husserlian motifs and further develop Husserlian 'theories' without raising the question of this philosophical gesture in general could be said to be an instance of the 'natural attitude', the philosophical inefficacy of which Husserl, perhaps better than anyone, has demonstrated.

When we say that Levinas, from his earliest writings, was concerned with the significance or the meaning of the reduction, this is not to suggest that from the first, or indeed at any point, he sets out intending to describe the ethical significance of the philosophical act. No such presupposition nor simple understanding of ethics is at work in Levinas, as we shall see later. What he is trying to do in his early work on Husserl is to investigate the 'metaphysical conditions' of the reduction - a reduction which, despite its intentions, Levinas finds to be a process of objectification and representation. It is true that in the 1940 essay he gives a more favourable reading of intentionality in so far as he finds the basis for the essential possibility of the reduction to be internally interwoven within the fabric of the intentional *Sinngebung*. It can be understood as the exercise of the existential freedom of consciousness ⁴. However, the mere reflexivity of consciousness in relation to its own performance of the reduction still does not satisfy Levinas that this, or

indeed any, phenomenology of the other, starting from the ego, can proceed without assuming the framework of objectification and representation, unquestioningly taking thematization to be the 'medium' of this thought. In a sense the very necessity of this thematization itself gets bracketed in Husserl: in other words, in Husserl's 'thematic phenomenology' the condition for all thematizing, which itself must remain unthematizable, is reduced to 'givenness' and does not get considered as a theme for interpretation at all. Levinas seeks an answer to a question which is essentially unanswerable, because it asks about the unthematizable; *it asks as to what signifies in the necessity of thematization*. As we shall see, this questioning takes the form of a quasi-phenomenology of 'experience' which examines *in* certain moments of experience which, he claims, indicate a system of relations to be found at a level prior to that of constitution, at what he calls the "level of life". At the centre of Levinas' phenomenology is an account of the relation between the same and the other, which in Western metaphysics is subject to an ontological representation. Since Parmenides, he says, it has been understood as a relation between entities, be they

ideal, real, transcendental or empirical etc. Even the very concept of 'otherness' from which Levinas' account must begin, forces it to speak in the same terms that it seeks to put into question. Here we arrive again at a general formulation of the 'problem' facing any discourse which seeks to take a step beyond metaphysics: language cannot speak otherwise than in the language of the tradition, and yet it seeks to articulate something other than it can represent to itself. An implicit 'theory' of language is therefore to be expected of any account of the beyond philosophy and as we shall see, Levinas responds to this demand in his account of the relation to the Other. The notion of thematization occupies a key position in Levinas' thesis that *ethics* is older than ontology and in his attempt to 'call us to responsibility' - a provisional formulation aimed at expressing what is supplementary to Levinas' aforementioned thesis. This rather awkward reference to the position this particular notion occupies, already draws attention to the work it will be called upon to do: it is related at once to what Levinas identifies as the "primacy of theory", in his early work, and whose primacy he rejects in the form of giving it a (negative) 'ethical' significance in his later work. The concept, therefore, has this double role of directing us to and acknowledging the necessity of thematization when we philosophize, at the same time

as reminding us that even our abstract philosophical concern with this *totalisation* is a function of the relation to the other qua Other. It is from within his thinking of the *necessity* of thematization that we find the key to understanding how the 'call to responsibility' and the call to philosophy are not to be separated in Levinas. We shall see that far from representing a rejection of thematizing thought, Levinas' *ethics* requires it. He aims to show that in ontological metaphysics the Other always suffers subjection to thematic representation (however one names or understands this moment). The supposed *neutrality* of theory is understood to be the mark of an *ethically negative* thinking of the Other - as an ethical "indifference" with regard to the Other. (Not to respond to the Other can be said to be 'neutral' vis a vis ethics, but the 'ethical neutrality' which is Levinas' ultimate target of criticism, is characteristic of the thinking which supposes itself to be neutral vis a vis the Other. It is to this second neutrality that Levinas could be said to ascribe a 'negative value'. And it is this very 'ascription of value' which is not possible at the level of ontological metaphysics.) For there to be anything in Levinas' claims for the ethical, which are themselves necessarily thematic representations; for language to be able to signify this excess, then it must be thought

otherwise than as the medium, or the being, of thematization. Exactly how Levinas' theory of language figures in relation to the separation and ipseity of the existent, we shall examine in the third section of this chapter.

We shall now look more closely at how Levinas uses the term thematization and at the thought which it is intended to articulate.

"Thematization and conceptualisation, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence. 'I think' comes down to 'I can' - to an appropriation of what is, to an exploitation of reality" (TI 46/16).

For 'conceptualisation' we can read 'the whole of the metaphysical tradition', which when thought of in terms of thematization can be subsumed under a single rubric: thinking closed to true alterity. The multifarious history of metaphysics has been, with the exception of certain moments ⁵, the thought of the same. Despite its sometimes explicit concern with otherness, notably in Hegel, Levinas says that the other in this tradition is subsumed within the system of the same. Theorizing, from the Greek theorein, to grasp, characterizes philosophical theses on the other and is to be contrasted to the absolute 'passivity' in terms of

which Levinas describes an openness to the other qua Other. Levinas' discourse is against the thinking which thinks the Other in terms of its inclusion within the tradition. It proceeds to rethink the *necessity* by which this is held to be the case and shows that this tradition represents the exclusion of the other qua Other.⁶ He is quite aware of the inability of a concept such as 'passivity', thought always (by the same *necessity* we just mentioned) in relation to its counter-concept 'activity', to express the Other as such. But the Other, it is simultaneously argued, manifests itself *καθ' αὑτό* despite its inconceivability within the Greek logos. The invisible revealed qua invisible?

"The manifestation of the *καθ' αὑτό* in which a being concerns us without slipping away and without betraying itself does not consist in its being disclosed, its being exposed to the gaze that would take it as a theme for interpretation, and would command an absolute position dominating the object. Manifestation... consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, expressing itself" (TI 65/37).

This expression (of) the Other, is not, however, autopresentation - a coinciding of being and phenomenon outside of any relation to the other - though it may appear so when Levinas says that this "revelation (is) a coinciding of the expressed with him who

expresses..." (TI 66/37). The revelation occurs always within the I-Other conjuncture in which "the Other enters into relation while remaining *καθ' αὐτό*, where he expresses himself without having to disclose himself from a *point of view*, in a borrowed light" (TI 67/39). "Revelation", which Levinas also refers to as "absolute experience" does not belong to anyone, nor is it subject to anyone's "point of view". It is, so to speak, the coinciding of a noesis and a noema, or a collapse of intentionality out of which two noemas emerge in an asymmetrical I-Other conjunction (we shall discuss this asymmetry shortly). A relation in which the terms are absolutely separate. The I-Other conjunction is not, in Levinas, the point of multiplication of intentionalities.

The *expression* of the Other is nevertheless, in so far as it is thought, subject to thematic representation. Levinas talks about *expression* as if it were outside the language of being and thematization. The question is whether or not this is possible without driving a wedge between thought and language. However, simply putting the question in terms of the 'possible' and the 'impossible' might already be to assume rather than question the appropriateness of the *logos* to the discourse on the Other. Levinas' discourse attempts to think the expression of the Other antecedent to

thematization ⁷ not by means of a notion of thought without language, but as a signifying behind the signification that language is, a signifying *beyond being*. Levinas' thinking is concerned with the relationship between philosophy and the Infinite. Language, as discourse, plays the non-mediating 'bridge' between itself as conceptualisation and itself as expression of the Infinite, which is and is not language (itself) to an extent determined by where one is on that bridge. We should perhaps move quickly away from this metaphor as it makes Levinas' too like Heidegger's Hegel, for whom "the absolute has its advent with us".

Instead of language as the becoming of history through contradiction and movement, and as involving the "dissolution" of the speakers into the neutrality of *all time*, language as "speaking, implies the possibility of breaking off and beginning" (TI 88/60). Levinas describes the absolute separation of the terms in the I-Other conjuncture as the "condition" for language. As we shall elaborate further below, the time of thematization is not the time in which the Other reveals itself; the time of thematization only bears a trace of the Other.

"...there must be thematization, thought history and inscription. But being must be understood on the basis of being's other" (OTB 16/20).

"Every logical definition - *per genesim* or *per genus et differentiam specificam* - already presupposes this thematization, this entry into a world in which sentences resound...The very objectification of truth refers to language" (TI 99/72).

Levinas' articulation of the necessity of conceptualisation in relation to thought of the Greek logos, of ontological metaphysics, in terms of thematization, is as important to his overall thesis as are the radical formulations aimed at expressing the thought which claims to come from beyond being. Most radical is his attempt to show that the latter refer to a 'reality' metaphysically 'older' than the former.

"We wish to show how, starting from knowing identified with thematization, the truth of this knowing leads back to the relation with the Other, that is, to justice" (TI 89/62).

This is possible on the basis of the 'interrupted'^e nature of thematized thought, and by focusing on those moments in which totalization is averted. Thematizing, paradoxically, is that through which the Infinite reveals itself.

The parallel with what Hegel says in the preface to PS once again comes to mind: the question of, or rather the rejection of, the idea that our relation to the Absolute is mediated. For Levinas, however, the presence of the Absolute to dialectical consciousness, in Hegel, represents the submission of the Absolute to thematization. In his own metaphysics he is adamant that "the infinite cannot be thematized" (E.g. TI 211/186). However, it would be hasty to judge Levinas to be pre-Hegelian, as we shall show.

For Levinas, objectification is the becoming thematic of objects, to which the 'I' in its solitude relates in terms of enjoyment (jouissance). He provides lengthy descriptions of the sensible nature of the relation of the 'I' to its element. Objectification and thematization already refer to the Other: "The word that designates things attests their apportionment between me and the others" (TI 209/184).²⁹ In distancing myself from objects I create a 'space' quite unlike that between two objects - objects thus objectified are no longer for-me (as they were in the relation of enjoyment) but are "designated" by me for-the-other. Thematization then is described as the designation of beings for the Other, not for-us, because the 'I' relates to 'objects' at the level of sensibility, otherwise described as enjoyment.

"To thematize is to offer the world to the Other in speech" (ibid).

This is the Descartes of the Third Meditation serving the rejection of Husserlian intentionality starting from me:

"In speaking I do not transmit to the Other what is objective for me: the objective becomes objective only through communication. But in Husserl the Other who makes this communication possible is first constituted for a monadic thought" (TI 210/185).

It is also considered a rejection of Hegel because the Other cannot be designated (for a third); cannot be made a theme, the Other can only be *spoken* to. This relation to the Other, the I-Other conjuncture, or what Levinas calls the *ethical relation*, is said to 'occur' outside of thematization and yet without any detraction from the necessity of thematization. On the contrary, it is said that the Infinite "...signals itself not as a theme but as thematizing..." (c.f. TI 99/72).

Saying that the Infinite signals itself as thematizing (thematization though this thought itself inevitably is) indicates the attempt to think thematization from the perspective of being's other. However we might come to understand this ultimately, what it clearly seeks to

draw our attention to is philosophy's inability to do this.

"Philosophy which is born with appearing, with thematization tries, in the course of its phenomenology, to reduce the manifest and the manifestation to their pre-original signification, a signification that does not signify manifestation" (OTB 65/82).

This, incidently, he would also hold to be true of the Heideggerian thought of ontological difference, not because Levinas understands Being (Sein) as the excellent being (Seiende), but because Being is held to be *nothing* outside of beings. He sees in this 'coinciding' or 'correlation' of Being with itself a *totality*; a totality characteristic of thematization. As we shall see shortly, it is what Levinas understands by the 'beginning within' thematized thought that enables him to speak about the *otherwise than being*. The signifying is not exhausted in the signified, says Levinas. This is attested to by the simple fact that manifestation, or being, occurs as having been signified, or, put the other way round - bearing the trace of a signifying 'prior' to "the dawn of manifestation". (ibid)¹⁰

"This signifyingness is then conceived in the tradition of the West as a modality of its manifestation, a light of *another colour* than that which fills the theoretical intentionality, but still a light" (OTB 66/83)

The tradition conceives the Other to be *accessible*, at least in principle, to a form of reflection; apprehensible qua intelligible in a moment of intellection.

Bearing this in mind we shall now look at the role of Levinas' analyses of the sensible in his thought of the Other.

Sensibility, the 'I' and its identification

The sensible is and is not understood in relation to its opposite, the intelligible. That is to say that the analyses of the sensible proceed aware of a certain fact about metaphysical discourse, namely that it is impossible to sever a concept from the conceptual framework in general. We have spoken of this already. Nevertheless, as Derrida might put it, these analyses, on one level, involve giving priority to the traditionally underprivileged term within a metaphysical couple. The general principle behind this being that if the Other is other than the conceptual thought of metaphysics can represent, then any thought seeking to represent the other's alterity in relation to metaphysics must 'distance' itself not only from the traditional concept of the absolute other, but also from the traditional concept of the (self-same) subject. Such a radically new metaphysics must therefore also be a new thinking of the subjectivity of the subject. Levinas' own term the same does not merely refer to the subject as it is to be found in ontological metaphysics, but the entire subject-world continuum. It has therefore something Heideggerian about it, but it is of course presented in an account

which ultimately is a rejection of the Dasein-world account of 'subjectivity'. In other words it should be read as an alternative rejection of traditional conceptions of subjectivity to that of Heidegger, but one which has learnt from Heidegger. This will become clearer in a moment. This is what is at work in Levinas' account of the subject in terms of its sensibility. Here we find an account of the subject 'prior to' its conception in terms of its intelligibility, despite the fact that the account itself is necessarily presented and read conceptually. The account thus creates a tension within our conceptual response to it, because it treats the subject as if it were separable from the conceptual framework in which it is necessarily conceived. In fact, what we see here in Levinas is a general questioning of the *necessity* with which thought is conceptual. The objection might be made here that Levinas' project simply fails to recognise that the *necessity* he seeks to question is also that which governs his own language. We aim to show that this is something Levinas responds to in his account and in any case does not seek to 'reject' as such. We shall also show that this account of the subject enables Levinas to articulate a thought which, as we have already noted, does not consider itself to be non-thematizing but in part aims to show that the Other

signifies "not as a theme but a *thematizing*" (TI 99/72).

In order to move towards an understanding of this remark about the Other, let us first consider the account of the 'I' and its identification.

In Existence and Existents, (EE), Levinas presents us with an account of the subject by posing the question: How is that which exists constituted? He describes a non-thetic subject in terms of its substantivity which is to be contrasted with the intelligible subject identified on the basis of its transcendence and by means of negation. His account takes the form of several phenomenological studies, such as those of effort, fatigue, sleep, insomnia and hypostasis, which can also be seen as being preparatory for the more detailed account of sensibility, ipseity and separation in TI. These studies can also be read as a polemic against the Heidegger of BT (in particular Div.I Sec.3) with Heideggerian notions being opposed by Levinas' own series of terms, for example: enjoyment is opposed to equipmentality (jouissance/Zeughaftigkeit), love of life is opposed to care (amor de la vie/Sorge), living from... is opposed to throwness (vivre de.../Geworfenheit). Enjoyment refers us to a level of life at which the subject relates to its element in

terms of sensibility, rather than to its world qua constituted, in terms of intelligibility. For the time being let us postpone questions related to Levinas' simplification of Heidegger and take this rejected Heidegger merely as an internal feature of Levinas' thesis. Likewise with the simple objections that one could raise and which we have already spoken of in relation to the use of terms 'borrowed' from the Greek logos. We have also already said that from his earliest writings, Levinas' inquiry proceeds aware of the importance of moving against the questioning and conceptualising which is "already formulated in terms of the given cosmos of Greek rationalism" (EE 101/173).

Enjoyment describes the relation to things, it refers to the irreducible corporeity of the existent (person) and the possibility of total satisfaction with regard to corporeal needs. (Here again, Levinas sees fit to oppose this satisfaction to the Heideggerian for-the-sake-of... [Worumwillen], or project of existence.)

"Not everything that is given in the world is a tool. Food is supplies for logistics officers; houses and shelters are a base. For a soldier his bread, jacket and bed are not material; they do not exist for..., but are ends"

(EE 43/65).

It is through the satisfaction of need that the subject, the existent, "masters" existence and thereby effectuates its own separation and an openness to a Desire that does not refer to a lack. The absolute 'independence' of the subject in relation to existence in this moment, its ipseity, opens it up to an alterity outside the order of essence. The relation of the subject to existence is not such that it is a thing among things which are related to each other through negation. It is rather an interiority which makes its upsurge from existence not by negating an exteriority (being or existence) but through the satiation of its needs. Existence in general, or the there is (il y a) is a notion in which the traditional emphasis on the first syllable of ex-istence is removed. The subject is not merely a standing out from a more general existence, arbitrarily caught between being and non-being; it is wholly separate. The subject's relation to the element suggests a pluralism within existence which cannot be reduced to a multiplicity (of beings). Such a pluralism also suggests that the alterity of the other existent must be thought on a basis other than its essential difference. We may anticipate the problem of solipsism in association with such a notion of radical separation, because it appears that the subject would be left with no basis on which to think the other existent without falling back on the notions of

essence, transcendence and negation. To see why this is not a problem in Levinas we must look closely at the shift of emphasis in his account of the subject from the traditional preoccupation with its identity to the 'movement' of its identification. In EE the preparatory studies for the account of sensibility which appears in TI, get underway by placing an emphasis on the corporeity of the subject. This could be described as an intentionality of the body, but one which refers to sensation prior to the appearance of the body as a self-identical object of reflection. Levinas describes the body primarily as the taking up of position. This is not, one must stress, a position in relation to other existents, but position in relation to "anonymous existence", the there is. The upsurge into existence of the subject is not here thought of as an ec-stasis but rather as a dia-stasis. For example, in the upsurge into existence which occurs in the moment of effort, the subject takes up position, but in going out from this base the subject does not depart from it, thereby effectuating transcendence, it occurs rather as a dis-location: it is both out there and back here. This is what Levinas means when he says that there is a "lag" between the 'I' and itself. In the upsurge of the existent the subject 'appears' but there is an indefinite

postponement of identity across this lag: an identification which does not produce an identity.

"The body is not posited: it is a position...it is the eruption in an anonymous being of localization itself" (EE 71/122).

The time of this indefinite identification is thought of in terms of the Instant, the Instant in which presence is deferred. This lagging behind itself of the 'I' is characteristic of the dialectic between effort and fatigue, it refers to the dis-location and re-location of the 'I'. In fatigue the existent "folds back upon itself" (EE 81/138) - it sleeps.

"Sleep re-establishes a relation with a place qua base...it is by leaning on the base that the subject posits itself as a subject" (EE 69-70/119).

The use of the word "posits" here does not refer to a reflective act of consciousness as it would in Husserl, but rather to the sheer physicality of position. Although the equation of thought and substance would appear to give primacy to 'bodily existence', we must remember that it does not do so in the sense of 'embodiment' or in the sense of organicist reductionism. It aims rather to draw out the full significance of the fact that thought recollects itself here in a head, not by means of an intellectual act,

but because it never forsook its base. In Levinas the body represents the "indissolubility" of the subject.

Levinas maintains that these studies in EE rely entirely on the "phenomenological method", and yet as we have seen, it is used to establish a break with Husserl, whose own understanding of intentionality refers all intentionality to objectifying intentionality. Let us look a bit closer at how this 'method' is at work in the studies we have so far referred to.

In his account of the relationship between existence and the existent, Levinas appeals to an 'immediacy' and 'directness' which are akin to Husserlian appeals to pure experience. As his analyses are developed, however, we come to see that his notion of directness is of a different kind. For example, in the reversal of the priority of existence over existents, he says,

"...there are certain moments in human experience where the adherence of existence to an existent appears like cleaving". (EE 22/27)

You notice that he says in (de) experience. Such moments, which are decisive with regard to what Levinas is trying to do here, are said to be constitutive of human experience but are essentially prior to its

constitution as such. Experience is in a sense being treated as a secondary phenomenon, and the time of experience as divisible. Indeed without the account of time as a series of Instants it would make no sense to say that these moments were 'experienced' at all, because they do not 'appear' in a temporal flow or ecstasis (the time of constituted objects). Levinas says that by putting oneself in the moment of effort, for example, one "directly perceives" the taking up of existence as opposed to the reflective awareness or 'intellection' of the experience: one perceives the event itself and not merely its "significance with respect to some system of references" (EE 30/42). These moments are said to occur in "a hitherto unsuspected dimension". He directs us toward this "unsuspected dimension" and yet at the same time defers any transcendental justifications of this method saying that the investigations "will bring the necessary clarifications of this principle by the application they shall make of it". We see in this rather peculiar remark an awareness of the difficulties of making claims which are simultaneously contrary to and yet rely on certain traditional concepts. By bracketing questions concerning the theoretical status of what he is doing he is, in a sense, blindfolding us. He does this so that we might be more sensitive to what cannot be seen, to what, due to our preoccupation with the

visible, we might ignore. There is a criticism here of the heliotropocentrism of Western metaphysics; the association of light, illumination and the possession (or 'theoretical grasp') of what is; the primacy of intelligibility, the panoramic. The suggestion is that our desire for comprehension is what prevents us from being sensitive to what is 'immediate'. He is saying more in this than that his claims will be substantiated if we remain patient (although there is an element of this), more importantly he is saying that what we might ordinarily regard as substantiation may prove to be inappropriate.

If we think again: the accounts of effort and fatigue are not presented as interpretations of phenomena - interpretations of what is present in experience - but as "direct perceptions" of the event of taking up existence. The subject does not identify itself by saying "I am me" as does the transcendental ego of Husserl, which gains possession of itself by doing so. With identification at the the level of sensibility, the subject is never 'whole' in this sense; it occurs as a movement of the body, thereby realizing position, which requires recommencement in each Instant. Contrary to the Husserlian subject of the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, the Levinasian subject is not an ego amongst alter egos. So as far as the account of the

subject as a substantive is concerned, the issue of solipsism is simply irrelevant. You could say that this 'I' does not know... and that what is said about the substantive subject relates to all such existents.

The substantivity of the subject, its 'hereness' could be said to be the 'condition' for its enjoyment of the element: it represents the possibility of its interiority and its *egoism*, as Levinas says. Interiority thus has a "foothold in being", but Levinas seeks to demonstrate that this does not rest on an egological intentionality: it already refers to the Other. The alterity of the Other is differentiated from the otherness of things. In TI the relation of the 'I' to the element is expressed in terms of the otherness of things being reduced to the sameness of the 'I'.

"The way of the I against the *other* of the world consists in sojourning, in identifying oneself by existing here at home with oneself (*chez soi*). ...Everything is here, everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site, everything is comprehended. The possibility of possessing, that is suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me, is the way of the same. I am at home with myself in the world because it offers itself to or resists possession. (What is absolutely other does not only resist possession but contests it, and accordingly can consecrate it.) This reversion of the alterity of the world to self-identification must be taken seriously; the *moments* of this identification - the body, home, labour, possession, economy

- are not to figure as empirical and contingent data, laid over the formal skeleton of the same; they are articulations of this structure" (TI 37-8/7-8).

This movement, described as the "upsurge" of the existent, for example in effort, is the substantivity of the subject and what "must be taken seriously" in this formulation is 'the outside world'. It "resists" in a manner reminiscent of Sartre's facticity, but the relationship between facticity and consciousness in Sartre is of course quite different from the relation between the 'I' and its element. Earlier we recalled that these "articulations" of the 'I' are associated with a "lag" between the 'I' and itself; this distended 'I' stretched between itself qua base, position or here and the 'out there' experienced in labour etc. This refusal of the here, characteristic of the 'I' in relation to the element coupled with the necessity of the return to the here (for example in sleep), and sometimes described as the "foothold in being", shows that 'the world' maintains its otherness in relation to the 'I' or the ego, in Levinas - it is irreducible. "Suspension" of otherness is "the way of the same", he says. Traditionally this may have been referred to as 'negation', but what Levinas' studies are intended to demonstrate at this point is that negation is not all of metaphysics.

"This mode of negating while taking refuge in what one negates delineates the same or the I. The alterity of a world refused is not the alterity of the Stranger but that of the fatherland which welcomes and protests. Metaphysics does not coincide with negativity"

(TI 41/11).

We may add in passing and by way of further clarification that this is presented by Levinas, as a critique of the tradition in which Heidegger is understood to be included. Levinas' objection to Heidegger's thesis of *disclosure* is not that the identifiable or self-identical subject disappears in favour of the anonymous Dasein (and that this is somehow ethically undesirable) but that the disclosive 'act' of projection (as Levinas apparently understands Geworfenheit) reduces the other (in general) to the same. On the model of ecstasy in Heidegger, Levinas sees no scope for the exteriority of existents (beings); for a difference which is irreducible to the thinking of the same. You could say that for Levinas ecstatic temporality is the time of identity. He would see it this way because of the way in which he understands the ontological difference in Heidegger. He sees the movement toward the ontological proceeding by means of reduction of the ontic, even if this is held to be a reduction 'in reverse' ''; even if we acknowledge that the ontic is 'secondary' in so far as

it is based on the precomprehension of Being by Dasein. The otherness of the world in being-in-the-world, which is disclosed simultaneously with, or as an aspect of, what is disclosed through the projection of Dasein, is an otherness reduced to the same within this very moment. As with Levinas' ego chez soi, Heidegger's Dasein reduces the other to the same, as we have already said of the former, *at the level of meaning*. The difference is that for Dasein there is no other level (of being). It is the very "autochthony" of the 'I', an aspect of the substantivity of the subject, which prevents it from producing its own notion of the other, in Levinas. In Heidegger, Dasein's other always appears to it as mine, mir eigenes. Here we see something that Dasein and the Levinasian ego have in common: each is a "suspension" of otherness and each is a thought of the same. It is the autochthony of the 'I' which guarantees its openness to true alterity: another intentionality comes to it independently of its own and *disrupts* the totality of the same closed in on itself. We shall now look at how this "breach of totality" works in Levinas and how and what it signifies.

From the other (autre)

to the Other (autrui):

The interpersonal in Levinas

Levinas aims to show that what disrupts the totalising thought of the same is the 'encounter' with the other person. The relation between the 'I' and the Other (person) is the concrete event of the ethical in Levinas. Here we find the entire problematic of the relation between metaphysics and its other, or another signification 'mapped onto' the *ethical relation*. Emphatically, we are not to understand the I-Other conjuncture as a metaphor for the metaphysics/other relation. We should say that there is no difference between the two: metaphysics as the going beyond of itself is the 'enactment' of ethics for Levinas.

The account of the subject that we have just looked at may appear to function in connection with the account of the relation to the Other as if it were 'the condition for the possibility of...' the (ethical) relation. In fact this is not the case at all and we come to realise that the thought of the subject, being and the "foothold in being" that the subject has, are all secondary in relation to what is called the *ethical relation*, a relation which is always already entered

into. In the following chapters we shall look closely at how this works. We can approach this anteriority of the ethical relation from many different directions within Levinas' account, but it is useful at this point to refer to the account of the subject and its element. The satisfaction of need, being-at-home-with-itself and the dwelling characteristic of egoist being, collectively express the sovereignty of the subject in relation to the other in general. This imperialist 'I' is a movement which suspends otherness and which, with the qualification given above, can be called a 'reduction' of the other to the same. From the outset of TI, Levinas contrasts the need of the subject with what he refers to as "metaphysical Desire".

"The metaphysical desire tends toward *something else entirely*, toward the *absolutely other*. The customary analysis of desire cannot explain away its singular pretension. As commonly interpreted need would be a the basis of desire; desire would characterize a being indigent and incomplete... It would coincide with consciousness of what has been lost; it would be essentially a nostalgia, a longing for return. But thus it would not even suspect what the veritably other is. The metaphysical desire does not long for return, for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves. The metaphysical desire does not rest on any prior kinship. It is a desire that cannot be satisfied"
(TI 34/3-4).

Here once again Levinas is polemicising against Heidegger, but whether or not the charge of "nostalgia" is really appropriate, the point of what is being said is quite clear: the alterity of the Other is absolutely irreducible, it comes not from within the circuit of sameness of the 'I' at-home-with-itself, but disrupts this circuit and surprises this 'I' ¹². It interrupts this circuit in such a way as to prevent the satisfied 'I' from becoming absolute, or omniscient. It does so not by making a territorial challenge to the subject, but by simply (being) otherwise; by being other than the otherness which the 'I' can make its own. It comes on the scene not as a threat but as the Desired. The way in which Levinas describes "metaphysical desire" is suggestive of a contiguity between it and the 'other person' from the outset. This 'contiguity' and its significance is at the centre of Levinas' thinking in general, and it is in the thinking of it that the entire claim that the going beyond (ontological) metaphysics of thought occurs as *ethics*. The encounter with the Other qua other person is not merely a phenomenological experience of the social. Such experiences, Levinas would maintain, belong to the realm to which Husserlian phenomenology is most apposite, namely the realm of the constituted. The encounter with the other person is also not a metaphor. ¹³

In the account of the subject we are provided with a model of 'intentionality' at the "level of life". In the description of the hypostasis of the subject in terms of the "lag" between the 'I' and itself, the movement of this substantiation of the subject is characterised by recommencement in each Instant. Time as a series of Instants was contrasted, at different points above, to ecstatic temporality, temporal flow and 'all time'. These, Levinas would say, are models of thinking time appropriate to the *constituted*, we called it the "time of identity", contrasting this to the "time of identification" appropriate to Levinas' substantive subject. We now ask the question: how is it that the time of identification already refers to the Other? Levinas makes the relation to the Other even 'older' than the identification of the 'I', not merely older than its identity in 'phenomenological time': as a relation already entered into, the ethical relation must be prior to the 'relata' which participate in it. The paradox redoubles in that this also requires the absolute difference of the two terms to be preserved if this relation is truly a relation to the Other qua Other. It must always be remembered that the encounter with the Other is not the encounter between two 'I's, Levinasian existents or otherwise. The 'I' at-home-with-itself is concerned with the identifiable; it takes itself to be absolute. It is in this process of

self-identification that it is *disrupted* by the Other, but this transcendental thinking of the same cannot think an otherness other than that which it posits itself; it totalises the other in the "schema of the same". The "absolute difference" Levinas requires between the Other and the same is therefore a difference not thought of in terms of essence. Philosophy, as a questioning of what is other, is a questioning across a difference. Levinas would agree with Heidegger that the most fundamental gesture of philosophy is a questioning in response to what astonishes thought, namely the other, but he sees this tradition to be the self-interlocution of the same. According to his reading of the ontological difference this is particularly clear in the case of the relation between Sein and Dasein; the ontological difference is the basis for a hermeneutical circuit of sameness and as such is the mere eddy of the same. As we noted earlier, when discussing thematization, Levinas says that the manifestation of Being as beings is indeed 'primary', this is what he means by the same's concern for and possession of what is. Manifestation occurs within the time of identity. And in OTB, where this thought is expressed more explicitly in terms rejecting the imperial role of presence in ontology, he seeks to distinguish his own thinking from this tradition by saying that his ethical metaphysics is concerned with

"A past more ancient than any present, a past which was never present and whose anarchical antiquity was never given in the play of dissimulations and manifestations, a past whose *other* signification remains to be described, signifies over and beyond the manifestation of being, which would thus convey but a moment of this signifying signification" (OTB 24/31).

This notion haunts every gesture in Levinas' attempt to demonstrate that "ethics is first philosophy". Philosophy as questioning is primordially an address to another person; it is conversation. It therefore betrays the anteriority of the I-Other conjuncture and that this conjuncture is the 'place' where the thought of another signification is encountered. At one point Levinas says that it is the attempt to describe this anteriority that governs his entire research.

However we come to regard Levinas' peculiar reading of Heidegger, we must not think that his remarks are aimed merely at redressing the ethical neutrality of Mitsein or Miteinandersein or the ethical neutrality that Heidegger openly associates with the thought of Being in Letter on Humanism.¹⁴ We recall how Heidegger says there that "such names as *logic*, *ethics* and *physics* begin to flourish only when original thinking comes to an end".¹⁵ Levinas seeks neither to re-establish nor privilege ethics as it was understood in pre-

Heideggerian metaphysics, nor to claim that what Heidegger understands by "original thinking" is what he wants to call *ethics*. The relation whose anteriority Levinas aims to describe is held to be that without which the thought of Being and the philosophy of essence and identity could not have 'got underway'. His remarks are aimed at directing us toward an orientation within thinking, toward what he has referred to as "a past which was never present". He claims that this orientation is exclusively to be associated with the relation to the other person: in the *face to face*, as he calls it, one is oriented toward that which lies beyond being, namely the Good.

It may at first seem extraordinary that Levinas should resurrect the subject as a basic move against the metaphysical tradition in which it has played such a governing role. Indeed all important thinkers since Hegel have taken the deconstruction of subjectivity, in one form or another, to be a key move in their own metaphysics. In fact on one level Levinas' account bears some similarity to those of Heidegger and Derrida, for example, in that it is based on a radical account of time which nullifies presence, or rather self-presence as the definitive characteristic of the (self-identical) subject. After all, even if Levinas does not regard Heidegger himself as being radical in

the same sense, surely his critique of Descartes moves along similar lines. Also Derrida's notion of time as *spacing* - the silences between words which of themselves say nothing but which articulate the entirety of thought - is a way of taking up a Heideggerian theme and is a de-structuring of the subject. Levinas has something in common with these gestures recalled here in so far as he offers a critique of the subject as ego and as self-identical centre of consciousness - we have seen that he calls this *the same*. What Levinas does seek to redress is what may be called the *de-substantification of the subject*. The account of the subject as position signifies a break with the thought of identity. This absolutely separate subject is required for the relation to the Other to be maintained and not to be taken merely as an 'effect' of the totalitarian thinking of the same. The notion of time as a series of Instants is crucial to the signifying of the Other; it is in the non-coinciding of the subject with itself across the discontinuity of time that the ethical dimension is to be traced.

Let us recall that "time is not a succession of Instants filing before an 'I'"; the event of hypostasis occurs 'within' the Instant. This is not to deny the experience of the transcendent 'I' but this experience

occurs within the time of identity - a time in which the 'I' is closed to true alterity. Levinas calls this time of identity the time of *economy*, because, he says, this is the time in which the events of the past can be forgotten in so far as the present always compensates by allowing the event to disappear into the logos of history: it is the time in which time (having been present) passes. ¹⁶ Once again, and according to Levinas' use of the phenomenological method, we are directed towards certain moments which are held to signify the anteriority of the relation to the other person and which signify in the time of the non-definitive subject. Consider for example the caress:

"The caress of the consoler which softly comes in our pain does not promise the end of suffering, does not announce any compensation, and its very contact is not concerned with what is to come afterwards in economic time; it concerns the very instant of physical pain, which is then no longer condemned to itself, is transported *elsewhere* by the movement of the caress and is freed from the vice-grip of *oneself*, finds *fresh air* and a future" (EE 91/156).

In the caress, the approach to the other person is outside the time in which his identity occurs, and yet the separateness of the terms in this relation is required. ¹⁷ Before the identity of the terms is determined, the 'I' moves toward the Other, it is thus seen to be joined to that toward which it moves before

it moves. A being which existed wholly in the time of its identity would be incapable of such movement. The caress is not determined by the intentionality of the same but by the approach of the Other. In OTB Levinas calls this proximity. Experiences such as the caress, so described, indicate that the thought of the same, which Levinas maintains is the thought of Western metaphysics in general. Ontology, is fractured by the thought of the Other which 'comes to light' within this tradition. Metaphysics is like a container which proves too small for its contents. (We shall return to this theme of the infinite within the finite.) In TI the ethical relation par excellence is the *face to face*, where it is described as an "irreducible" relation.

"Our analyses are guided by a formal structure: the idea of Infinity in us. To have the idea of Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated. This separation cannot be produced as only echoing the transcendence of Infinity, for then the separation would be maintained within a correlation that would restore totality and render transcendence illusory. But the idea of Infinity is transcendence itself, the overflowing of an adequate idea. If totality cannot be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other".

(TI 79-80/52).

The *face to face* encounter is not between two separated 'I's; the relation is asymmetrical. The 'I' whose

"insular sufficiency is accomplished by enjoyment" (TI 216/191) and thereby its identity, welcomes the Other and can be a "host". The *face to face* is not, however, a variation on being-alongside; in the *face to face* the 'I' takes up a position in which it is oriented toward what lies 'beyond the face'. The *face to face* is the origin of language for Levinas, but we have already noted that this origin signifies not in the time of self-identical subjects, in the time of economy; it signifies in a time whose past was never present and is therefore said to be *an-archic*. In the *face to face* the Other does not present himself to the 'I'; the "epiphany" of the face of the Other signifies outside of presence and absence. This origin of language is thought by Levinas as the *disruption* of the same, it is metaphysical Desire and is ultimately claimed to be a 'moral summons' which is reflected in

"...a concrete moral experience: what I permit myself to demand of myself is not comparable with what I have a right to demand of the Other" (TI 53/24).

Metaphysics did not begin with this moral summons but had already begun before the *relata* of the ethical relation were separate. Separation is nevertheless the first event. It is the first event and already posterior to the relation to the Other. The temporality

of this paradox is expressed by Levinas in terms of the anterior posteriority of the ethical relation. The relation signifies in the metaphysics of the same as belonging to an *otherwise than being* which is 'older' than being, presence, and time itself, which together are the articulation of ontological metaphysics. It can signify thus, because the subject is not the plentitude it takes itself to be. Dis-continuity and dia-stasis characterize the subject. The paradox here is that the discontinuity itself occurs as ethical provocation:

"The oneself has to be conceived outside of all substantial coinciding of self with self. Contrary to Western thought which unites subjectivity and substantiality, here coinciding is not the norm that already commands all non-coinciding, in the quest it provokes" (OTB 114/145).

The provocation of the Other 'begins' with the "first word", which is the phrase "you shall not commit murder". This is not a command which calls for obedience but one by which the 'I' relates to the Other as absolutely irreducible; for Levinas the "absolute resistance to murder" (TI 199/173) indicates the infinity of the Other's transcendence. The asymmetry of the I-Other conjuncture thus signifies as ethical obligation, paradoxically: the Other "assigns me before I designate him" (OTB 86/109) and yet this "alterity

is possible only starting from me" (TI 40/10). We have seen how this paradox is maintained in Levinas' account, it is succinctly expressed in the following:

"These differences between the Other and me do not depend on different 'properties' that would be inherent in the 'I' on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other, nor on the different psychological dispositions which their minds would take on from the encounter. They are 'starting from oneself' toward 'the Other'. The priority of this orientation over the terms that are placed in it (and which cannot arise without this orientation) summarizes the thesis of the present work" (TI 215/190).

Contradictions in the 'formal logic' of this structure are of no concern to Levinas here because the claims being made will not call for verification within the thought of the same. As an alternative to this we may provisionally suggest that they seek rather to participate in the provocation they announce. The absolute otherness which comes to me, comes to me as my-responsibility-already-taken-on: I exist this responsibility in the accusative form. This is why, in OTB, Levinas expresses the relation to being, here-ness, as a bare me voici, here I am. ¹⁰. The subject as the accusative me is not declined from the nominative, an example of which, Levinas tells us,

is the pronoun se for which Latin grammars have no nominative. ¹⁹

The force of Levinas' studies does not rest on any logic, and the thought of anteriority is quite openly non-logical. Its closeness to life, as is the case with other 'phenomenologies', plays an integral role in whether one decides to go further with this thought. The accounts of how the Other disturbs me in concrete and everyday ways; the hungry face, the outstretched hand, the orphan, the widow, hospitality and welcome, do not serve to clothe a theoretical structure but are where thought of the Other begins. ²⁰ The studies serve to show us how in such experiences I am related to the Other not on the basis of his intelligibility (and therefore his identity and presence), but first to an intelligence. If I ask of the Other whom I address the question "who are you?", then the question reduces the 'who' to a 'what'; the 'who' is reduced to a relation between quiddities and refers us to the 'situation' of the 'who', or the situated-who. When Levinas meditates on metaphysical Desire he finds that it is *already a question addressed to the other person*: orientation towards the Infinite is an always already having entered into the *face to face*. ²¹ In taking up an absolute position *here*, the 'I' thereby conceded the sovereignty of position to other subjects, but the

relation between these subjects in the *face to face* is not an I-Thou, it is a relation to the Infinite. In asking the question "who are you?", the question asks as to the 'who-ness' of the one addressed, for which Levinas coins the word quiescency ²³; it does not ask as to identity but is a relation to a face: there is no 'I' which of itself could be responsible for the Other in the sense Levinas describes. In this we are being referred to the 'origin' of the meaning of 'responsibility'. A theme we shall continue with.

Let us rehearse the circularity inherent within the paradox which we have before us. The anteriority of the ethical relation implies that it temporalizes time 'itself'. As such it is even anterior to the diastatic hypostasis of the subject, as described above - the time in which the lag between the subject and itself already refers to the Other (and despite this being the movement in which it accomplishes being-at-home-with-itself). This says that temporalization amounts to the calling to responsibility (by the Other). This 'calling to responsibility' signifies in two 'directions' at once ²²: in the face of the Other it signifies beyond essence and does not refer to essential difference, but it also signifies the "hitherside" of the subject revealing its dia-static substantivity before its identity. That philosophy thus

already refers to the Other; that the thinking of the same is disrupted by the Other; that the 'I' (of identity) conceives respect as a relation between equals, but cannot conceive what is wholly other; that the I-Other conjuncture is asymmetrical - all these things refer us to a notion of responsibility which is more profound than any hegitarianism (if we may borrow a ruse from Derrida).

"Under the eye of another, I remain an unattackable subject in respect. It is the obsession by the Other, my neighbour, accusing me of a fault which I have not committed freely, that reduces the ego to a self on the hitherside of my identity, prior to all self-consciousness, and denudes me absolutely... To revert to oneself is not to establish oneself at home, even if stripped of all one's acquisitions. It is to be like a stranger, hunted down even in one's home, contested in one's own identity..." (OTB 92/117).

Originary time as the deferment or postponement of totalisation (or presence), says Levinas, begins, in the sense of 'recommences', in each Instant and it is effectuated by the call to responsibility coming from the Other. This account of the I-Other conjuncture places it outside of history - which is the time of the same - thereby disarming the defence of injustice toward the other person in the name of history: I am not judged by history but in face of the Other. Each Instant is not historically definable or representable

on the basis of what it is or comes to be, it is meaningful within the face to face as the postponement of completeness: the ethical relation triumphs over the fait accompli of history.

Perhaps this can be made clearer by contrasting the eternity realised in each Instant to Heidegger's being-toward-death (Sein zum Tode). In Heidegger the anticipation of death fixes the finite limit within which the question of Being is opened and asserts its primacy. Within this finite duration, Dasein remains concerned with what is its own, with the being which is "in each case my own". But the Instant is not a definitive gap between the present and the cessation of my being, it is rather the indefinite lag between me and myself - I face death but never immediately. Across this discontinuity, there continues to be the forever possible recommencement of the Instant; a time remaining in which I am responsible for the Other. The infinite divisibility of time renders my death insignificant with regard to the meaningfulness of my life because my death is infinitely deferred; I always have all of time before me such that in each Instant I realise the eternity to which I am committed and therefore the seriousness with which that must be confronted.²³ Originary time, says Levinas, is time for the Other; this can be characterized by the way in

which consolation and forgiveness remain the possibility of the dying man unto his death.²⁴ On this level the old are no nearer the end of their time than the young because each life is contemporary with the Instant of the eternal or Infinite.

We shall close this chapter by referring the work of the last two sections back to the first. As we made clear in the first section of this chapter, Levinas insists on the necessity of thematization and therefore history itself. Indeed he says that the Infinite "signals itself as thematizing" (op cit.). The way(s) in which Levinas' discourse locates itself within the tradition are manifold and more implicit than explicit. They do not lend themselves readily to *linear* exposition, Levinas himself not being concerned with the 'theoretical' structures of the relation between the within and beyond of metaphysics.²⁵ In saying that the Infinite signals as thematizing, Levinas shows his fidelity to the thought that the Infinite is anterior to thematizing, as he puts it in OTB - to the Saying before the Said. It also demonstrates the non-mystical nature of his claims for the ethical relation, in so far as we can see here a commitment to 'reason' and the necessity for rational thought. However, the discussion of reason, for which one could read 'philosophy', figures in Levinas' account from the standpoint of

being's other. This is in contradistinction to the tradition of ontological metaphysics which thinks reason in terms of its own theoretical excellence. To this Levinas says:

"When the 'I' is identified with reason, taken as the power of thematization and objectification, it loses its very ipseity" (TI 119/92).

From the 'way round' that this remark is structured it is at least clear that Levinas intends to centre his thought on how it is that the *otherwise than being* signifies rather than with its possibility or sayability. We are provided with an account of the subject's ipseity, and how this figures in relation to the signification of an otherwise than being and how without this the subject would remain closed to true alterity. To think the tradition from this other 'perspective' is to think it otherwise than it thinks itself, but it is not to stop 'dealing' with it. How does the traditional conception of reason bear on the relation between individuals?

"Reason makes human society possible; but a society whose members would be only reasons would vanish as a society. What could a being entirely rational speak of with another entirely rational being? Reason has no plural; how could numerous reasons be distinguished?" (ibid)

In Levinas, anterior to reason in the sense we have looked at, is the *face to face*; reason is a latecomer to the *face to face*, but it nevertheless is what refers us to society and therefore to justice. Reason arises with the arrival of a *third party* (le tiers) to the *face to face*. Does the arrival of the third party compromise the *face to face*? Levinas says it does not. In fact he says that the relation to the Other "founds" reason (TI 203/178). Discourse, which has its 'origin' in the *face to face*, both effectuates the separation of the 'I' and the Other and yet maintains the *face to face* as a relation without relation, that is, as a relation always already entered into prior to the identification of the terms. Elsewhere, Levinas emphasises that it is the orientation of the relation - beyond the face of the Other - which has priority over the terms placed within it (TI 215/190-1).

Within the *face to face* the face of the Other brings the first signification; in speaking the Other thematizes - in the terminology of OTB, the Saying is Said - (c.f. TI 207, 218/182, 193-4). Interrupted in each Instant by language (which Levinas recognises to be all of thought), the *face to face* is both signifying and signification; anterior to the arrival of the third party it is 'pure' signifying, but interrupted in each

Instant by language (thought), it also occurs as signification and is already a reference to the Others.

"...the face brings the first signification, that is, the very upsurge of the rational... in the welcoming of the face the will opens to reason" (TI 218/194).

Signifying forever recommences in each Instant and in recommencing it resists totalization. Levinas says that language comes from the Other. We have seen how this requires a notion of the subject as substantive: a subject (thought) in terms of its sensibility; one which does not *think itself*; a subject whose identification is prior to its thought - not a thinking subject but an *enjoying* subject. In OTB the subject is described as an absolute passivity "more passive than passivity". The will of such a subject is necessarily a response to the Other:

"...it is not free to refuse this responsibility; it is not free to ignore the meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced it...Language is not limited to the maieutic awakening of thoughts common to beings."

(TI 219/194). 26

The third party does not compromise the *face to face*, but compensates for the radical asymmetry in which it is 'constituted'. The third party refers us to the community in which justice is possible; equality, characteristic of justice, has a political rather than

a fundamental value. The third party is implied with the first interruption of the *face to face*, not as an empirical intrusion of the intimacy of the *face to face*, but because the "third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other - language is justice" (TI 213/188).

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSGRESSIONS

LEVINAS, DERRIDA AND THE OTHER

Reading(s) and Writing

Derrida's two major essays on the thought of Levinas, along with his shorter articles, make him Levinas' most important commentator. Any thesis on Levinas stands to benefit by drawing upon the *incisive* reading which Derrida has given of Levinas' work. The limitations implicit to the genre of the *thesis* tend to be forgotten unless some kind of precaution is taken. This gesture is itself an aspect of Derrida's reading of other philosophical texts. Although the name 'Derrida' itself is no precaution against falling into metaphysical traps, his readings forestall any simplistic critical response to the texts he considers. One prevalent feature of Derrida's reading is the exposure of metaphysical presuppositions at work in the text. We shall see that this is also the case in his essay Violence and Metaphysics. In this essay Derrida situates Levinas between a reading which effectively places him within the tradition of western metaphysics, and another which emphasises the sense in which his discourse is outside the tradition; as caught between the two. Placing him outside the tradition paradoxically further confirms the efficacy of the first placing, by showing that the alternative is "unthinkable, impossible, unsayable".

Levinas' thought, occupying the space 'between' these two, a space which is produced by their difference, is an integral part of what it is, for Derrida, to be a thinker of the end of philosophy. In other words, this double reading of Derrida's/Levinas' is never intended to be merely a critical distancing of Derrida from Levinas, nor is it aimed at reducing Levinas' thinking to the purely traditional. In fact the ambiguity of both these relations is preserved in Derrida's reading. This in fact indicates a kind of fidelity to Levinas, because like Levinas' text itself, Derrida's does not seek to dismiss or refute the claims put forward in the text.

By examining Derrida's reading(s) of Levinas we shall gain a better understanding of the notion of *transgressive* discourse, in which both thinkers, in a sense yet to be clarified, are engaged. What is being transgressed? The text of western metaphysics, a drama from which no thinker can simply withdraw, is being subverted. This subversion itself, however, is not its aim - an anarchic upsetting of the applecart merely to see which way the apples roll. Nor for that matter is it part of a plot with a telos. We know this not least because the subversion of which we speak in this context has been going on throughout the history of thought as much as if it were a function of history

itself. What is so important in the work of Derrida is in fact not the identification of instances of rupture, which might verify the account of history, as say the subversion of *identity* (in other words, of metaphysics by itself). Equally important is recognising the significance of this; appreciating the extent of the potential effect. So we can see that talking of a telos behind the strategic deconstructon is not only inappropriate because the term is so metaphysically determined: it is inappropriate because the effect of the subversion is to be found in every recess of the text of Western metaphysics, and given the claim that there is nothing outside the text, we may expect that nothing will remain the same: its effect is general rather than particular.'

This proximity between Derrida and Levinas can be accounted for in terms of their understanding of what it is to be held within the tradition in such a way as, at the same time, to be seeking to subvert that grasp. Derrida's essay Violence and Metaphysics (VM), upon which we shall focus here, is an invaluable supplement to TI, as it does a great deal to expose the text's importance for philosophy and indeed its philosophicality. We shall ask: What is the price paid for this retention of the text for philosophy, in contradiction of the themes it clearly develops in such

a way as to transcend philosophy (ontological metaphysics)? And, to what end is such a retention, so masterfully performed, leading, when this thought seeks to justify itself within terms of its own necessity, and referring to nothing more (and nothing less) than the "inseparability of thought and language"?

These questions and related ones will guide this examination of Derrida's reading of Levinas, but they should not be seen as part of an attempt to 'put the ball back in Derrida's court' using a Levinasian racket, because they are already to be associated with those questions which Derrida, at the beginning of VM, says are "the only questions today capable of founding the community, within the world, of those who are still called philosophers" (VM 79). (A community whose founding fathers, Derrida says, include Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger.) In other words: unlike a merely good academic essay, the limit-text anticipates certain 'responses' to the closure in which Derrida locates the Levinasian text. Conceding the legitimacy of certain questions will not be a problem because the 'better' the question or process of questioning is, the more welcome it is in a philosophical community founded on "unanswerable questions...problems put to philosophy as problems philosophy cannot resolve" (ibid). Indeed the questions which concern the

end of philosophy are, according to Derrida, just as much questions Levinas puts to us as the other way around. The "unanswerable" questions which Derrida quotes and says are capable of founding a community of "responsible" philosophers today; questions philosophy puts to itself with regard to its own end, arise in relation to a

"...strange certainty about an *other* absolute origin, another absolute decision which has secured the past of the question (and) liberates an incomparable instruction: the discipline of the question". (VM 80)

The maintenance of this question as a question, says Derrida, is the responsibility to which philosophers are called today. Called in particular by Husserl and Heidegger. They are also called by the thought of difference in thinkers such as Marx, Freud and Levinas, says Derrida in his essay Differance, as we have seen above. In VM he refers us to "the difference between philosophy as a power and adventure *of* the question itself and as a determined event or turning point within this adventure." (VM 81) The difference between these two returns us to the thought of the other; the other of philosophy. One formulation places the other outside of philosophy and the other places it (somehow) within. However, as has been made clear and stated several times already: it is the difference which is

the concern of *thinking* in this philosophical community. Indeed it is difference (writ large, or even with an 'a') which enables us to distinguish between the thought of Husserl and Heidegger; it makes the conversation which is philosophy audible. We shall see how one aspect of the difference in approach between Levinas and Derrida is that the 'questions' of which we have just spoken, are in Levinas as much the implicit framework of the text as they are ever the explicit subject matter (indeed if they are ever the latter at all). One wonders about the nature of this difference, because the making explicit of what is implicit does not leave the implicit untouched. Nor is such theorizing itself a neutral process in the general context of these questions, as we made clear in Chapter 2.

A general synopsis of Derrida's approach to Levinas, which we shall expand on below, is expressed in the following: Levinas is a thinker of difference, and this is evident in the themes to which he addresses himself and in his treatment of these themes. The title of his book Totality and Infinity alone indicates a concern with the relation between philosophy, described as totalising, and its *other*, infinity. The relation between the two is everything (perhaps literally) and will provide either the key, or illustrate the lack of a

key, to the beyond of philosophy. Derrida seeks to show, among other things, that Levinas fails to recognise certain parameters that determine the possibilities open to philosophy within what he calls the *closure*; that Levinas cannot really say what he says without simply repeating certain metaphysical themes and that he fails to recognise this ensnarement as a result of not addressing himself to the tradition in its most inescapable pervasiveness, namely as *metaphysics of presence*. This reading of Levinas does not take the form of a straightforward critique, but seeks, as is characteristic of other deconstructive readings by Derrida, to find the points in Levinas' text at which the presence of *presence* makes itself felt. The significance of this for Levinas' account of the primacy of 'ethics' would be that it requires the veracity of what it seeks to put into question; it requires the totality (reason/being/the same) to be precisely what it claims to be, but this would radically exclude the possibility of the (absolute) Other. Levinas' project, says Derrida, requires that the *beyond being* be thought and said at the same time, which is impossible. Furthermore, this "impossible" functions at a much more profound level than that of formal contradiction.

In Existence and Existents (1947), Levinas declared that the aim of his thinking was to accomplish a break with "Parmenidean" metaphysics; the metaphysics of the unity of being. The "guideline" taken in going about this task was the Platonic notion of The Good situated beyond being, what he elsewhere refers to as the *beyond being* or Infinity. In Totality and Infinity in 1961, he announced that this aim had been achieved: "We thus leave the philosophy of Parmenidean being" (TI 269/247). In the same place he says that "Philosophy itself constitutes a moment of this temporal accomplishment, a discourse always addressed to another". The dialogue between Levinas and Derrida which finds expression in Violence and Metaphysics, helps us to understand this idea better, and it is worth noting straightaway that this is an indication of the way in which the "break with Parmenides" in Levinas, is inscribed within philosophy and discourse rather than in silence. It does not show, of course, that this "break" is what it claims to be, but it demonstrates Levinas' challenging of the classical Inside/Outside structure of all discourse, something which Derrida in other places too, has so well described. Derrida it would seem, does not think that Levinas does this in a satisfactory way. In Violence and Metaphysics he goes about demonstrating this by first giving a reading of Levinas' own readings of

other philosophers, namely, Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. These 'readings' are themselves no more a critical 'surpassing' of these thinkers than are texts by Derrida. Such a philosophical gesture would in any case be inappropriate here, as each of the thinkers in question challenges the primacy of reason, in their own way. Furthermore, Levinas has a profound affinity with Husserl and Heidegger in that they all place experience at the centre of philosophising, albeit changing the meaning of 'experience' in each case.

Indeed it is this appeal to experience to which Derrida is so allergic. In so many of his essays he goes to great lengths to show that it is a notion which is conceived entirely within the metaphysics of presence. For that reason one would expect it to be the most unlikely notion to be appealed to in any attempt to transform/transcend that metaphysics. In Grammatology, for instance, the primacy afforded to the immediacy, or immediate experience, of speech by the tradition, is challenged in the name of *Writing*, whose authority does not rest on any appeal to experience. The authority of speech rests with the author; the self-present hearer of the sign which is said, whereas *Writing*, first thought of as the antithesis of speech, refers to the absence of any author and gains its authority from its context, its interpretations and its

generating of difference in the form of multiply-fractured signs. This to the point where there may be more 'truth' to be found in a contradiction in Writing than in the voice of any authoritative author. Writing is only first thought as the antithesis of speech. The reversal of this priority produces more than an inversion (as do the significant 'reversals' in all the thinkers that Derrida would describe as thinkers of difference) because it transpires that speech could never have been what it took itself to be in the first place. In this sense Writing is capable of exposing speech to itself as a pretender to the throne of truth. At the same time, it becomes clear that Writing could never *merely* have been writing, namely, the graphematic representation of phonetic speech. The emergence of Writing, Derrida would say is 'epochal'; it marks the *closure of the metaphysics of presence* - but it does not simply transcend it.

On the trace and differance

In the summary which Derrida offers at the beginning of VM, of the philosophies of Heidegger and Husserl, he says

"The archaeology to which (they both) lead us by different paths entails, for both, a subordination or transgression, in any event a *reduction of metaphysics*". (VM 81)

The *transgression* is against metaphysics; against the Greek logos the one and only philosophical language. This being the only philosophical language implies that the philosophical dialogue between Husserl and Heidegger, the "two Greeks", can only be said and understood from within this language. Questions about the future of philosophy in view of its death or dying nature together with the recognition of the inescapability of the Greek logos are the two basic concerns of thinking capable of founding the "philosophical community" Derrida speaks of at the beginning of his essay, and to which we referred above. The thinking of the future would, under this rubric, be *transgressive* in the sense of making the limit of philosophy (namely, its 'Greekness') a thematic function of philosophizing. This is not to say that the 'limit' of philosophy must always be the subject matter

but it does imply that any thought which undertakes an internal critique must respond to this 'limit' as its internal parameter. Such an internal critique, governed by the two basic principles recalled above, certainly seems to be the basis of at least one of the readings of TI undertaken by Derrida himself, in VM. This reading focuses on the treatment Levinas gives to Husserl and Heidegger. We have already indicated and discussed in part, Levinas' relation to Husserl, and his seemingly peculiar insistence (accepting what we have just reiterated about ~~the~~ Greek ~~logos~~) on how his analyses rely entirely on the "phenomenological method". We saw in Ch.2 also how this 'phenomenology' refers us to the *level of life* rather than the world of constitution. Let us recall for a moment how Derrida often reminds us of the dangers of supposing that we can escape the consequences of using metaphysical language merely by redefining a few key terms, and at the same time let us note that it is precisely the transgressive character of TI which makes it an appropriate context for such reminders.

The reduction of metaphysics that Levinas undertakes,

"...seeks to be understood from within a *recourse to experience itself*. Experience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience: the passage and departure

toward the other; the other itself as what is most irreducibly other within it: Others." (VM 83)

As we saw in Chapter 1, in both Hegel and Heidegger the end of philosophy was marked by a *disruption* of thinking. In Hegel this is the moment when consciousness experiences the participation of the absolute in each step along the road to absolute knowing; that the road to Science is already Science. In Heidegger the disruption occurs as the 'failure' of thinking to bring metaphysics to its end (Vollendung); the failure of the thinker to provide the name for Being. For both of them the end of philosophy is 'in relation' to the other. In Hegel this becomes the subject's "self-recognition in absolute otherness". In Heidegger this is expressed differently in different stages of his thinking: it is the otherness of Being experienced in original anxiety. For each of them the end of philosophy is entirely within metaphysics and belongs to metaphysics. We shall see how different this is in the case of Levinas. Levinas very firmly places the 'experience' of the other within the totality (of everyday conceptual thought/experience) and this partly accounts for the rather idiosyncratic retention of the vocabulary of phenomenology. The concrete daily experience of moral consciousness is, in his descriptions, of no small significance, as we shall

come to reflect upon below. And when one considers that in his thinking he also seeks to revert the destruction of the subject/object distinction; "the dissolution of the 'I'" (c.f. Ch.2), then it is less surprising that Levinas sometimes uses what appears to be very traditional language. The issue is not as to whether one ~~may~~ use traditional language any longer, the idea that we do this of necessity is not a difficult one to understand. Accepting this, the question should now help us discover what makes one kind of use (or abuse) of the Greek logos more 'productive' than another in the discourse of the end of philosophy. This goes hand in hand with a questioning of the *neutrality* of this "productive".

At the end of his 1968 lecture "The Ends of Man"⁴, Derrida says that for the philosophy of the future to overcome the tradition, it must weave together two possible responses to limits imposed upon it by tradition. They were, namely, "to attempt a deconstruction without changing ground...(and) to decide to change ground, in a discontinuous and eruptive manner". We agree with R.Bernasconi's finding, in his essay "The Trace of Levinas in Derrida", that such an interweaving strategy is to be found in VM, in the 'double' reading given of Levinas' work there, and when he says,

"Derrida interweaves a reading of Levinas in terms of his intentions, with another where the emphasis is placed on the limitations imposed by the fact that he cannot evade philosophical discourse." 5

As Bernasconi shows, what might at first sight appear to be critique, can on reflection be seen to be Derrida's compensation for Levinas' writing as if one could simply shake off the tradition. In other words, what appears to be Derrida's attempt to restrict Levinas' discourse of the beyond being, should rather be seen as the provision of a 'strategic' balance to it. The reminder of the restrictions, or parameters for thinking concerned with the end of philosophy is not here intended as a criticism of an oversight, but rather as one aspect of what a limit-text, a text of the closure of philosophy, must be concerned with. This kind of reading is typical of the textual deconstructions which Derrida was to produce in the following years.

In stressing the limitations imposed by philosophical discourse, Derrida does at least supply the reader with an insight into what the issues are in thinking the end of philosophy. If it were true that Levinas' text exhibited the tendency to 'forget' the limitations of philosophical discourse then this thematic insertion of these issues into his text, might 'save' the text for

philosophy. A text which might otherwise drift off into obscurantism? Surely not. Nor does Derrida suggest this. At least not at the level of Levinas' *intentions*:

"The complicity of theoretical objectivity and mystical communion will be Levinas' true target. The premetaphysical unity of one and the same violence. An alternation which always modifies the same confinement of the other." (VM 87)

Derrida is emphatic that,

"...all our questions already belong to (Levinas') own interior dialogue, are displaced into his discourse and only listen to it, from many vantage points and in many ways." (VM 109)

This second quotation here serves very well as a general description of what is going on in Derrida's reading of Levinas. We should, nevertheless, perhaps add the qualification that although Derrida says that the questions already belong to Levinas' interior dialogue, he would not in general be so keen to make any radical distinction between what is brought to the text and what is found there. What is the nature of the questions (im)posed in the (con)text? Derrida says they are "questions of language: questions of language and the question of language" (ibid). Having accredited TI with being a text into which such questions may be displaced/are to be found, we come to a point at which Derrida makes a straightforward claim about something

that Levinas' text does not do: it does not pose "*formally and thematically*" the question of the relation between the tradition and transgression of the limits of tradition. This is what he says,

"...the attempt to achieve an opening toward the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed *within language* - except by *formally and thematically posing the question of the relations between belonging and the opening the question of closure.*" (VM 110)

If this is not the basis for a critique, it at least appears to be some kind of redress for an omission. Again it raises the question as to whether the formal and thematic questions of the closure constitute the supplementary text brought by Derrida to TI and whether Levinas' text is such that it can be receptive to them. Also, is it the case that the "double strategy" described above is already a function of TI? We have already expressed our reservations about reintroducing a distinction that has long since been dispensed with, between the text and the reading being given and it would be pointless to seek to resurrect it here. But with regard to whether TI exhibits an appropriate and adequate sense of the within to compensate for the gesture towards the beyond is not, we shall argue, a question of small consequence. Firstly this would imply that the motive for supplying the 'supplementary text', as we described it above (the formal and thematic

questions of the closure) was other than we had first thought, namely, "saving" the text for philosophy. Alternatively, Derrida's *formal* and *thematic* questions of the closure might be shown to be superfluous to *ethics* as Levinas would have us understand it. It may even prove that the ethical relation necessitates a rethinking of the closure, such that insistence on the *formal* and *thematic* would be seen to be purely academic (neutral). If this is true then it implies, firstly, that the signification of the Other within the tradition is 'non-philosophical' (or general). Conversely, (that is, seen from the *other* side) this would effectively imply that there is no privileged discourse in relation to the Other. Levinas might express this by saying that all discourse is always already an address to the Other; the relation to the Other is the 'origin' of language. We shall return to this in Chapter 4 in the discussion of the *face-to-face*.

It might be that at this time Derrida did not believe that TI exhibited a satisfactory notion of the within to compensate for the discourse on the beyond being. And when he says,

"We are wondering about the meaning of a necessity: the necessity of lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it." (VM 111)

the implication is not that this is what Levinas has intentionally done in TI. What is it, we are wondering, to be lodged in the traditional conceptuality intentionally or consciously when the one thing that seems to be clear is that thought is so 'lodged' of necessity. It seems that however we may come to understand this, to be a thinker of the end of philosophy, one must have incorporated this thought in a reflective way into the internal structure of one's thesis; one must have made this "reflexive turn" the decisive moment in thinking the end of philosophy. The question remains, however, as to the effectiveness with which this has been done. To have done it but ineffectively, would be to expose the gesture toward the beyond of philosophy to likely 'recapture' or 'neutralisation' by the traditional conceptuality, thereby divesting the text of its 'positive possibilities'.

The general aim of the incisive reading of texts, of the parasitic intrusion into the text with precisely such questions as those of the *closure* of philosophy, is to make the text 'signify' in the direction of another text. This is possible, it is said, because the text bears the *trace* of this other text within it. In one sense this style of reading the text could be said

to be a 'technique' for exposing the latent metaphysicality of the text. The technique would therefore be of special value in dealing with texts which are oriented toward the 'beyond' of metaphysical discourse - it could show the points at which metaphysicality persists/returns. (One may ask if this is not precisely what Derrida's appropriation of the trace involves - it traces/marks out these parameters for thinking, thereby holding the closure open). At the same time such a reading effectively produces a text which indicates, blatantly rather than latently, in the direction of the beyond of metaphysics whilst maintaining itself, literally within the metaphysical text. The question will be: *is this resignation to metaphysics closed to the thought of the Other?* This is the most important question in our consideration of the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida. This incisive reading of the text draws our attention to the difference between the text as it signifies within metaphysics and this *other* signification of the text which does not find its 'expression' within the metaphysical text, but nevertheless signifies as a trace of that other text.

In his 1968 essay "Differance" Derrida names five thinkers in whom the thought of difference is foremost and in the context of whose texts

differance can be silently traced. Bernasconi demonstrates very clearly that the notion of the *trace* could just as well have served to unite the theme of Derrida's article as the notion of *differance* ⁶. In a similar way to which the term *differance* "imposed" itself on Derrida⁷ the term *trace* seems to have imposed itself on the discourse of the end of philosophy, at least in Heidegger, Levinas and following them, Derrida. Between the three there is considerable cross-influence in interpretation of the term; between Levinas and Derrida (both having learnt from Heidegger and Derrida having learnt from both). The term, *trace*, perhaps like all of language, functions in relation to the metaphysics of presence and absence. In ordinary usage of the term a trace marks the absence of something which was once present. As with *differance*, which Derrida emphasises is neither a word nor a concept (but which in fact always becomes one in the text) the *trace* similarly is a marker in the text of metaphysics of something of which being cannot be predicated. In fact *differance* is not: *differance* is a *trace* (of *differance*.) The *trace* signifies the *other* of metaphysics within the text of metaphysics, whereas *differance* (is) the other (but only as a *trace*). This is all rather convoluted but I wish to make clear that the *trace* and *differance* are not the same for

Derrida. Let us look briefly at the trace in Heidegger and Derrida.

In Differance Derrida discusses Heidegger's The Anaximander Fragment²³. In The Anaximander Fragment, Heidegger gives an account of the ontological difference in terms of the difference between *presence* and (the) *present*. This forgotten difference is marked in the text of metaphysics, and here in the fragment of Anaximander, not by a trace as such for the *trace* is not a thing or substance; it is neither present nor absent in the text of metaphysics.

"The trace is not a presence but is rather a simulacrum of presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace; otherwise it would not be a trace but a monumental substance." (SP 156)

Let us recall that the reading of Heidegger's text is given here in order for Derrida to show how the thinking of *differance* can distance itself from the thought of ontological difference. Briefly, he does this in the following way. He says that *differance* is older than the ontological difference because it cannot be thought within the horizon of Being. Heidegger's recalling of the ontological difference from the oblivion into which it had fallen, takes place within

metaphysics and it discovers that metaphysics 'begins' with the forgetting of this difference. However, the genesis of this difference is not recallable within metaphysics because it is 'older' than metaphysics; older than language. Derrida's *differance* is a non-word, non-concept referring to the non-origin of the ontological difference, which, once it has fulfilled the task of 'referring', as it does in Derrida's text, can only itself be referred to as a *self-effacing* trace (of a trace). Why does Derrida unleash *differance* into this discussion of the ontological difference in Heidegger? Is it to demonstrate a realm of the 'older than old', an origin? On the contrary, he says,

"Not only is there no realm of *differance*, but *differance* is even the subversion of every realm." (ibid 153)

Derrida uses the notion of *differance* to show how the thinking of the ontological difference in Heidegger calls us to a repetition of metaphysics but does not prepare us for our own "venture" beyond the logos. He recognises the necessity of the "passage" through the thought of ontological difference, that the thought of *differance* is not possible without it, but he does not believe in the 'recuperability' of that *other*, of that which "has no name", for thinking. For him this is Heidegger's "nostalgia". The trace of *differance* in Derrida does not indicate the recuperability of *differance*, nor even the recuperability of the trace.

Differance is what enables the text of metaphysics to be read; renders it intelligible. It does so in a similar way to which the spaces between words make them identifiable. In Derrida, the play of *differance* is endless: one does not track down things - "one tracks down tracks".

For Derrida, thinking within the ontological difference produces two kinds of texts: texts which do not adequately take into account the necessity of being held within the tradition in their attempt to think against the logos and texts which fail to recognise the way in which from within the thought of ontological difference we are referred "beyond the history of Being, beyond our language as well, and beyond everything that can be named by it" (ibid.157) It is Heidegger's account of the ontological difference that has opened up this space for thought. The ontological difference confronts thought with the unthinkability of the difference between Being and beings; the unthinkability of the difference between the within and the beyond of metaphysics. Heidegger's thought is ambivalent in this respect:

"To the extent that...logocentrism is not totally absent from Heidegger's thought, perhaps that thought (is still held) within the epoch of onto-theology, within the philosophy of presence, that is to say, within philosophy

itself. This would perhaps mean that one does not leave the epoch whose closure one can outline. The movements of belonging or not belonging to the epoch are too subtle, the illusions in that regard are too easy, for us to make a definite judgment." ☞

For Derrida this space which is opened for thought by Heidegger's meditation on ontological difference is a place of "indecidability" and it is, therefore, the point at which a deconstructive reading is likely to be most 'productive'. 10 The *trace* is what 'spaces'; what holds open the opening for thought at this point and therefore Derrida seeks to preserve (aufheben) its indecidability. This is why 'interpretation' of the *trace* is so crucial in the thinking of the *closure*.

In Derrida the *trace* is always of another possible text; it effectuates the call

"in the language of being - (for) the necessarily violent transformation of this language by an entirely different language" (SP 158)

In Levinas, the *trace* is always the trace of the Other, the Infinite, the Good beyond being. It is the trace of a 'realm' in which the *ethical relation* to the Other is entered into prior to the realm of being, identity and difference. We shall now look at why the *trace* is so central in our consideration of Derrida's reading of Levinas.

The trace in Levinas

Levinas first explicitly employed the notion of the trace in the two essays "The Trace of the Other" (1963)¹¹, and "Meaning and Sense" (1964)¹². He employs the term to extend and deepen his meditation on alterity; an otherness not conceived on the basis of difference. The general thrust of these studies begun in the 1940's and developed and 'repeated' in various works since then, remains the same: to give an account of the relation to anOther (autrui) whose alterity in relation to the same cannot be expressed or experienced, within metaphysics of being, more precisely, on the basis of the difference between beings. In a section entitled "Eros" in Time and the Other (1947)¹³, Levinas already explicitly raises questions such as the following,

"In civilised life there are traces of this relation with the other which must be investigated in its original form. Does there exist a situation in which the other would not only have alterity as the reverse side of his identity, would not only obey the platonic law of participation where every term contains a sameness even though this sameness contains the other?"¹⁴

The use of the term *trace* here does not have the meaning it bears in the later essays, but it is,

coincidentally, used in a place which begs a questioning of how the relation to the Other is reflected in 'the world', in morality. This passage is cited here to remind us of the longstanding sense of the necessity of breaking with the "cosmos of Greek rationalism", which resonates throughout Levinas. In the The Trace of the Other, Levinas does not give us a formal and thematic account of the trace, he rather attempts to show the manner in which the trace signifies.

The article begins with the sentence:

"The Me is the best kind of identification. It is the origin of the phenomenon of identity."¹⁶

In Chapter 2 we discussed in depth the moment of the identification of the 'I' in Levinas and explained how the separation of the 'I' was necessary for the I - Other conjuncture. Discussion of this theme, in both EE and TI, in a sense, concentrates on 'this side' of the conjuncture. We have speculated on the sense in which this account was a feature, and one instance among many in Levinas, where we see evidence of the commitment to the "foothold in being" (EE); to the tradition; to what Derrida in one place calls his respect for "a zone or layer of traditional truth" (VM 132). The discussion of the trace in The Trace of the Other refers us to the 'other side' of the I - Other conjuncture. It thinks

from this 'other side' in so far as the discussion elucidates the manner in which the Other signals within the same whilst maintaining its alterity - it signals as a trace. Polemicizing against Heidegger's ecstasy of Dasein, as he had already done TI, he says:

"Does there exist a meaning of signification which will not be equivocated by the changing of the Other into the Same? Can we have here a thing so strange as an experience of the absolutely exterior, a thing as contradictory in terms as a heteronomous experience?"¹

The 'experience' Levinas has in mind here would be contradictory in the sense that it would not be, through the return of the 'I' to itself - the circuit of selfness - a negation of the experienced. This suggests that the word 'experience' is rather inappropriate for what Levinas will seek to describe. We remember that in the studies which described how the existent accomplished its separation, in EE and TI (discussed in Ch.2) the word 'experience' was inappropriate there, too, when it came to naming the movements of the subject. The word event was preferred, avoiding the reference to reflection implicit in the concept of experience. Surely then, the movement toward the Other, without return, would similarly be better designated by another word.

"The heteronomous experience for which we are looking - will be an attitude which cannot be converted into a category and in which the movement toward the Other will not reclaim itself by an identification, will not return to its point of departure."¹⁹

The 'attitude' Levinas speaks of here, he characterizes as ingratitude. As the 'I' does not found itself in relation to the Other, but dwells solitudoously in relation to its element, it does not, in its 'relation' to the Other, reduce the Other to the same.

"The desire for the Other is born in a being for whom nothing is missing."²⁰

The first three sections of the essay all deal with themes that had been dealt with in greater detail in TI. In the context of what follows on the *trace*, of particular note is that:

"The Other is present in the cultural complex and is clarified in this complex as a text is by its context (my emphasis)...The Other does not come to us only through context; he has a significance of himself without mediation. Its cultural signification reveals and is revealed through the historical world in which it belongs...The Other is given concretely in the totality..."²¹

The discussion of the *trace* in The Trace of the Other will help us better understand the way in which the Other signifies within the totality; in what sense it

still refers us to the play of presence/absence, within history. By looking at that now we shall follow a route that will bring us back to the main themes in Derrida's reading of Levinas in VM. Levinas puts the question thus:

"How is it that the countenance is not simply a true representation where the Other renounces his otherness? To answer this, we are going to study the exceptional significance of the trace and the personal order where such a significance is possible."²²

At this point Levinas describes several aspects of the encounter with the *countenance* of the Other.

"Why do shivers run through me when I pass indifferently beneath the gaze of the Other?...The presence of countenance...puts an end to the detachment of consciousness...The epiphany of the absolutely other is the countenance where the Other calls out to me and signifies for me an order on behalf of his nudity and his destitution."²³

When he refers to the "detachment of consciousness", he is referring to the 'I' in its solitude. This 'I', as we explained above is said to "take up its existence" and "dwell" in the element. The accomplishment of this being-at-home-with-itself (chez-soi) of the 'I' is the 'condition' for the relation to the Other, the ethical relation. Paradoxically, the ethical relation is prior to this identification of the 'I'; prior to the sojourn

of the 'I' in the world qua constituted. In TI it is in his attempt to elucidate this paradox that Levinas introduces the notion of the *anterior posteriori*. The ethical relation is 'older' than 'I' qua existent; the 'I' which is present. The world of the constituted 'I' is posterior to the ethical relation, but to this 'I', which is the 'I' of conceptual thought, it appears a priori, hence the description *anterior posteriori*. Within the thinking which Levinas describes as 'ontological metaphysics' the Other appears, as a trace. *This is the point at which Derrida would object that the trace does not appear at all, because it is always a trace which effaces itself as it traces.* We shall come back to this shortly. Before that we shall now look at how Levinas' thinking of the trace can be seen as an attempt to "speak from beyond being". This will eventually lead us to an appraisal of his claim to have broken with "Parmenidean metaphysics".

We can see from what has been elucidated above that the model for thinking from the 'other side' has no pretensions to dispensing with, or diminishing the place of the logos (the 'side' of the same) in thinking. Nor does Levinas' thinking ever truly separate the finite and the infinite: the finite is always to be heard in the in-finite. What Levinas does do is to challenge the omniscience of the logos. The

discourse on the *trace* aims to show the anteriority of the ethical relation (N.B not the Other 'itself') to the ontological 'realm', by appealing to the trace of something 'older' than chronology itself; not thinkable (in time) but 'encountered' in the ethical relation. This is the trace which ruptures the totality, according to Levinas.

Levinas' assimilates his thinking on the *trace* to the trace of the One in Plotinus, the notion of the Good beyond being in Plato and Idea of the Infinite in Descartes. We want to show that his own meditation on the *trace* does in fact involve what Derrida would describe as a "double strategy", thus acknowledging the necessity of thinking from within the tradition.

We shall show that, this thinking undertaken from within the *trace*, which is beyond being, goes farther than demonstrating this necessity and its meaning for thinking at the end of philosophy. It does not seek to describe the *inter-dependency* of being and the One/the Good, nor to describe a *hierarchy* of two, the Good and being, which could be thought by means of the metaphor of height: The Good beyond being is "higher than height". Collectively the analyses could be held to demonstrate that the thought which holds itself in the *closure* of philosophy but which takes the "double

strategy" of thinking simultaneously from within and beyond philosophy and which describes a 'parity' of the two, remains closed to the trace of the Other. It would refuse utterly the *presence* of the Other in the trace and thus remain closed to *true alterity*. In Levinas, contradictory as it may seem, the Other, because it is truly Other, can tolerate (and requires) being made 'present' in the trace; the alterity of the Other does not suffer in the ethical relation, on the contrary it is accomplished in the *face-to-face*. What we are saying here is that when Derrida reads Levinas and stresses the necessity of thinking from within the tradition (something Levinas expresses in terms of the infinite within the finite: the in-finite), as if to compensate for the excesses of a thought claiming to come from beyond being, he is effectively rejecting what Levinas has to say about the asymmetry of the finite/infinite.²⁴

The Other is capable of 'participating' in presence.

"Do we not answer in the presence of the Other to an order of which the significance remains irremediably disrupted...Such a signification is the signification of the trace. The beyond from which the countenance comes signifies as trace. The countenance is in the trace of the Absent..." (ibid)

Thought from within the thinking of the trace, in Levinas, the traditional conceptuality has been disarmed, at least to some extent (if one can speak of 'extent' here) of its *omniscience*, so its two master concepts, whose names are used here, do not bear the values that they formerly possessed. Metaphysics is not thereby *pacified*, violence is not in this moment suspended or postponed: this text is still philosophy. Only in the ethical relation is the violence of history deferred. The "absolutely Absent" from which the Other "proceeds", is of course not simply absent in the way which the absent would be absent for a thought which had not come to think the possibility of another signification than that of the Greek *logos*. Having attained the thinking of the trace, need Levinas be so allergic to these words which, in one way or another, are scare-quoted all along: why not, indeed, dress up in the "devils patches" when there is nothing else to wear? When philosophizing we must wear our clothes. It is not insignificant that the encounter with Other, the ethical relation, is the place in Levinas where the metaphor of nudity and nakedness is used so effectively. Could it be that at this point Levinas is more ready to accept the necessity of "using the stones of the house in order to destroy it" than Derrida himself? Probably not and not least because it is Derrida, more than anyone else, who has given us to

understand the nature of this necessity. Why then is Levinas less wary than Derrida in his use of them? The answer is that as the target of his criticism of the Greek logos is not explicitly (nor "formally" and "thematically") to expose it as the *metaphysics of presence*, but to demonstrate how the Other signifies within the totality: the emphasis is simply placed elsewhere (we will not say yet that is of another nature)

What Derrida seems least willing to accept is that the trace can be said to be present and that it is also what he would call a "self-effacing trace", which for Levinas it also clearly is.

"The unhiddenness which restores the world, leads back to the world, and is the property of the sign or of a signification, abolishes itself in this trace"²⁷

Levinas certainly does think of the trace as somehow being 'present' within the totality, as we have said, not in any simple sense, but neither is it such that it 'remains to be determined' by philosophy. It cannot become a substance (in fact, as in Derrida, it is not anything as such at all). He says the trace "obliges us in relation to the Infinite". In OTB he says the 'I' becomes a mere accusative before the Other (c.f. ch1 f.n. 47a).

History and the trace

A crucial point in the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida revolves around Levinas' presentation of the trace within metaphysics and how this bears upon any understanding of history. The contradiction (and let us not forget here Levinas unashamed rejection of "formal logic") acceptable or unacceptable as it may prove to be, is expressed by Derrida in the following:

"Doubtless this encounter with the unforeseeable *itself* is the only possible opening of time, the only pure future, the only pure expenditure *beyond* history as economy. But this future, this beyond, is not another time, a day after history. It is *present* at the heart of experience." (VM 95)

The contradiction arises because,

"Language cannot make its own possibility a totality and *include* within itself its own origin or its own end." (ibid)

The sense in which the trace is 'present' within history, for Levinas, can be referred back to the notion of overflowing which we looked at in relation to Descartes Third Meditation in Ch.1 Sec.4.

"What counts is the overflowing of objectifying thought by a forgotten experience from which it lives." (TI 28/xvii)

This forgotten experience is reflected within the totality as a trace. That Levinas does not digress into a systematic scare-quoting of all the terms of his discourse nowhere reflects a 'carelessness' with regard to the ineluctable logos. For him it is not directly an issue to show that the risk of metaphysical reappropriation is ineluctable.²² In VM Derrida often speaks as if Levinas' aim was to make this 'experience' accessible within metaphysics. What he says implies that Levinas misses the sense in which the absolutely other cannot be *absolutely* other and be represented in the text of metaphysics;

"...(the) "absolutely other" cannot be stated and thought simultaneously; it cannot be absolutely exterior to the same without ceasing to be other..." (VM 126) "Or, at least cannot be, or be anything ; and it is indeed the authority of Being which Levinas profoundly questions. That his discourse must still submit to the contested agency is a necessity whose rule we *must attempt to inscribe systematically*. (VM 95f.)

Once again Derrida calls us to the thought of subverting the text as a means of forestalling its reappropriation by metaphysics. This is a theme to be found in many different places in the writings of Derrida (at least when he concerns himself with the *closure as a theme*) as he does in the following:

"We must elaborate a strategy of the textual work which every instant borrows an old word from philosophy in order immediately to demarcate it...This is why I so often use the word 'history' but so often too with quotation marks and precautions that may have led to the attribution to me of... a rejection of 'history'."

The opening for thought achieved by Heidegger's thought of the ontological difference is to be held open by means of *textual devices*: this deployment of technical devices within the text of metaphysics is the kind of disruption that has a chance of deferring the moment of metaphysical reappropriation; it is a disruption of history which is a *re-spacing of the Text*.

Derrida often writes as if what we are confronted with in Levinas is an unacceptable "rejection" of history; an unacceptable digression into eschatology. He says that to relate the *trace* to experience is to make experience itself eschatological. Continuing from the citation above, he says that the Other

"...is *present* at the heart of experience. Present not as a total presence but as a *trace*. Therefore, before all dogmas, all conversions, all articles of faith or philosophy, experience itself is eschatological at its origin and in each of its aspects." (VM 95)

Derrida is making the point about the "rejection" of history in the con-text of TI. In other places in VM, in another 'reading', he draws attention to the manner in which TI does not reject history but is engaged in the reinterpretation of history at the end of philosophy. For Derrida the greatness of the work is to be measured according to the extent and manner in which it can be the con-text of this question. (This is of course what we were talking about above in reference to the opening remarks of VM). Let us go back now to Levinas' discussion of the *trace* to see in what ways the work it does in the Levinasian text, "in breach of the totality", differs from the work it does by being inscribed within the *closure* in Derrida.

Towards the end of The Trace of the Other Levinas uses the term *illeity*, he-ness, in referring to the beyond being. The term emphasises that the encounter with the Other is an encounter with an Other and not with an impersonal One. (And yet the Other and the Good are not identical.) In TI, in the *face-to-face*, I am *oriented* towards the Good; I am oriented beyond being, towards the Good. In TO, in the same place, Levinas also refers *illeity* to the third person; *illeity* is a reference to the third. But in TI, the role of third party is to refer the *face-to-face* to reason: society is not a relation between two. In TO the third seems to

be used to refer us to the beyond rather than 'back' to society. The notion of *illegitimacy* is held to transcend the distinction between my relation to the Other in the *face to face* and my relation to the other person who enters upon the scene *qua third party*. My relation to the *third party* is through my objective knowledge of him; the relation to the third is the archetypal, or even empirical, encounter with the other person, but already refers us to the *face to face*. The place of the third in TI is and remains, in our view, ambivalent and we shall undertake a more detailed analysis of this term in the following chapter in connection with the discussion of the *face-to-face*.

The section of TO entitled "The Trace and He-ness" begins thus:

"If the meaning of the trace consists in signifying something without causing it to appear; if the trace establishes a personal and ethical relation with he-ness but does not uncover this relation - then the trace does not lend itself to phenomenology, to the understanding of 'appearing' and 'dissimulating'. Then, at least, there is another way to approach the trace, by locating its meaning in relation to the phenomenology which it suspends."³⁰

In relation to the discussion above, this passage reminds us immediately of three things. Firstly, a signification which does not cause appearance reminds

us that the Other is 'present' within the totality but not in any ~~sense~~ representable in the ~~logos~~. Secondly, saying that the trace is "beyond phenomenology" does not mean that Levinas will not continue to use, what he refers to in several places as, "the phenomenological method". In Chapter 2 we saw how his analyses of work, fatigue, sleep, insomnia etc., showed them to be "non-phenomena". Thirdly, when he says we can "approach the trace, by locating its meaning in relation to the phenomenology it suspends", we can note this could equally be said to be a description of the 'method' involved in using the trace to (a) work a system of displacements in the text of metaphysics and (b) simultaneously raise the question of the relation between this displacing and the thinking it displaces. In other words, what we see here is the sense in which the Levinasian trace can be referred to the *closure* of philosophy, which is, as Derrida would be the first to say, at the level of thought.

As we said before: in Levinas, the trace is not, however, referred to a text, the Text, the displaced text of philosophy: it is the trace of the Other. The trace functions within the text of philosophy as sign but it does not 'belong' to philosophy; it does not belong to "the world";

"The trace is not a sign like any other. But it does play the role of a sign, can be taken for a sign...The authentic trace...disturbs the order of the world."³¹

The trace of the Other is a mark, in history, of his having passed by. We spoke of the 'self-effacing trace' above in relation to both Derrida and Levinas. Now we can see how this notion of the trace is found in both of them but with a different significaton. In Levinas it is the trace qua sign; the trace as it appears in the text of philosophy which is self-effacing. In this self-effacing the "authentic" trace of the Other is "to be seen"/marked as the trace of "He (who) has passed by absolutely" (ibid). *This trace is not, cannot be effaced*. No sooner has Levinas said this than he adds,

"But every sign is, in this sense, a trace."

The "authentic" trace was distinguished from other signs only to be likened to them a few sentences later. This may appear at first sight to be a blatant inconsistency, and at the level of "formal logic" it may in fact be so. However, it is consistent with the claim, worked and reworked, deepened and resaid in so many different ways, in Levinas, that "ethics" /the *ethical relation* is 'older' than ontological metaphysics.

"...Over and above what the sign (ie the sign in ontological metaphysics) signifies, is the passage of the person who left the sign. The significance of the trace duplicates the meaning of the sign put forth in communication. The sign finds its consistency in this trace." (my parentheses)??

The relation to the Other, in the trace, is what conditions/makes possible, communication at the level of signs, namely, communication in the Greek logos: 'communication' is a priori. At least we could say that were the a priori not a reference to the chronology of the logos. We have already referred to the notion Levinas uses to transcend this contradiction: it is the anterior posteriori. Levinas provides us with an apposite example at this point;

"In a letter, for example, the significance is in the writing and the style of the letter, in everything which shows that at the time of the very sending of the message, which we grasp from the language of the letter and its sincerity, someone passes purely and simply. This trace can be taken once more for a sign."??

Any text, though a letter serves well as an example, is addressed to the Other(s): the relation to the Other is beyond the Text of philosophy. My communication/discourse on the Other, is already for the Other in this sense. Writing is first an address: addressing the Other 'I' am pure accusative, me voici: the text is a *Signature*. It may look as if Levinas has taken a long

route back to empiricism at this point: that the end of philosophy in Levinas is literally an end to philosophizing. This is not so.³⁴ Levinas' account of the *trace* does not refer us back to the collectivity of *being with others* as in Heidegger's *miteinandersein*. The relation to the Other in Levinas is not to be in the presence of the other in the sense which is characteristic of *miteinandersein*. The trace in Levinas "is the presence of whoever, strictly speaking, has never been there."³⁵ In Levinas the *trace* is a "passage" (*la passe*) towards the Other. The thinking of the *trace* is not a thought which would bring philosophy to an empirical halt, on the contrary:

"Trace as trace does not lead into the past. It is a passage itself toward a past which is farther removed than any past from any future, a passage which is still taking place in my time."³⁶

Thinking, meditation on the *trace*, is thus a mode of being in the trace of the Other. Such is the *philosophy* of the trace in Levinas, however, the *ethical relation* does not occur at the level of thought, it is located only in the *face-to-face*.

History, rupture and the Instant of interruption

We have seen how for Derrida what is called history is a 'play of differences', like other concepts it is an effect of this play. That history can never present itself as "absolute history" is because the 'play of differences' "remains in complicity" with the logos. In other words: if history is a 'circle'; if history is a *totality*, then it is not possible to say whether it is a finite or an infinite totality, precisely because within it there would be nothing to differentiate the two.³⁷ Levinas' 'rejection' of history, for Derrida, takes the form of relegating it to the order of the same (VM 93/4). It becomes the quasi-history of the ego as it takes up existence in relation to the element. At this point Levinas only has the notion of Enjoyment to support his rejection of the charge that this 'dialectic' of the Instant "entails a certain negativity" (VM *ibid.*) This leads Derrida to say,

"One wonders whether history can be history, *if there is history*, when negativity is enclosed within the circle of the same, and when work does not truly meet alterity, providing itself with its own resistance. One wonders whether history itself does not begin with this relationship to the other which Levinas places beyond history. The

framework of this question should govern our entire reading of Totality and Infinity." (VM *ibid.*) ³⁸

The logical consequence, which Derrida draws our attention to, is that a metaphysics of absolute separation, such as Levinas', must think the Other as a positive plenitude, but it cannot be stated and thought at the same time. This thought does indeed govern Derrida's reading of the work and is characteristic of the gesture of deconstruction: it seeks out the point within the text under scrutiny, at which it attempts to found itself on a transcendental signified, or directs us to an 'origin' (archè). In doing so it seeks to show not only how this notion of archè is logocentric, but also how the questioning of the thought of archè remains in complicity with the logos. The logos is 'unescapable'; speaking against it always confirms it. Derrida is correct when he suggests that Hegel is the figure "on trial" in Totality and Infinity. Levinas understands this criticism well and responds to it in OTB by stressing the an-archy of the *trace*.³⁹

In fact the an-archy of the relation to the Other, in the *face-to-face*, was already clearly to be seen in TI. Ironically, it is the ability of the an-archic trace to 'defer' presence which led Derrida to adopt it into his own later writings⁴⁰ and indeed into VM in the way

of alterations to the text for its 1967 publication, albeit with a "Heideggerian intention".⁴¹ Despite the functioning of the *trace* in Levinas, Derrida charges Levinas' text with thinking the Other as a positive plenitude and its consequences: the ethical relation, the *face-to-face*, is to be in the trace of the Other; it occurs (entirely) within history. Levinas claims, to the contrary, that in the *face-to-face* I am uprooted from history"⁴² - history is 'suspended'; history is put in brackets. In fact this epitomises the *ethical*

"To think and to speak is to interrupt the course of history. To live an eternal life is to be able to judge history without waiting for its end."⁴³

Both Levinas and Derrida have a discontinuous notion of history. For Derrida history is "fractured" it is, despite its own self-understanding, incapable of being a whole.⁴⁴ History always bears within its "margins" another text. What then is the difference between Derrida's notion of history as 'rupture' and Levinas's 'interruption' of history in the ethical relation ?

This difference must in the first instance be referred back to the diatribe on the Inside/Outside, namely the necessity of the inside/outside structure of language. We shall ultimately see that the difference between

Levinas and Derrida can be expressed in these terms (or in the apparently similar terms of the in-finite). Lets put it briefly, now, in the following terms: for Derrida the inside (of metaphysics) is the outside, a model for which the image of the Klein bottle, a topological paradox, comes to mind. For Levinas, emphatically it is the preservation of the absolute difference of the terms in the relation which is crucial to the breach of totality. For Levinas there are no 'decisive' ruptures of the totality. Sometimes it may appear that there are: for instance, those marked by the 'emergence' of the *trace* in the text of metaphysics in the form of the trace in Plotinus, the Good in Plato and the idea of the Infinite in Descartes. These would then constitute decisive moments in a "history of the Face", as Bernasconi suggests.^{4.15} The danger here would be, as Bernasconi points out, that this is too readily likened to the history of Being in Heidegger, in fact it is in a sense dependent on it. What must not be forgotten is the radical sense of 'anteriority' ascribed to the *face-to-face*, which we shall return to shortly. The relation to the Other, the ethical relation, is effectuated in each instance of the *face-to-face*. And it is by referring back now to the notion of the Instant in Levinas, discussed in Ch.2, that this difference between Levinas and Derrida can be best understood.

In the previous chapter we looked at how the notion of the Instant related to the "identification of the 'I'"; how it functioned in relation to the same. At various points we have tried, with reference to relevant points in Levinas' text, to show the sense in which his thesis thinks 'from the perspective' of the Other. In each case this is a kind of thinking in two directions at once - we have seen how the notion of the anterior posteriori is a paradigm of this paradox. On the same model, the Instant does not of course only refer to the "identification of the 'I'", which is both anterior and posterior to the ethical relation - in the sense we have explained. The Instant is equally the time of the *otherwise than being*. As we have seen, the Instant is prior to the 'I' of identity, but it is also the time of the Other: in the Instant, I am responsible for the Other, not in such a way as would be determined by history, but absolutely. It is a time in which I always have time, like Zeno's arrow, whose flight is eternal, for the Other.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSASCENDENCE

**THE FACE TO FACE, LANGUAGE AND
THE THIRD PARTY**

Transascendence

"This absolute exteriority of the metaphysical term, the irreducibility of movement to an inward play, to a simple presence of self to self, is, if not demonstrated, claimed by the word transcendent. The metaphysical movement is transcendent, and transcendence, like desire and inadequation, is necessarily a transascendence." (TI 35/5)

The title of this chapter takes its name from a neologism coined by Jean Wahl and borrowed by Levinas in TI to capture in one word the sense of the transcendence and the elevation of the Other. Having mentioned the term in this context Levinas does not employ it systematically in the analyses he then goes on to present, showing the sense in which the transcendence of the Other is a transcendence unlike that thought by the tradition, he simply 'borrows' the word 'transcendence' from the tradition. We wish to show in this chapter the sense in which the term as used in Levinas is both/is neither a verb and/nor a noun: the Other is Transcendence and transcendence is the movement, or taking up of an orientation by the same toward the Other in the *face to face*.

In examining the *face to face* and its relation to the *third party* in Levinas we are focusing on one of the

formulations of what might be said to be the philosophical problem with which his work grapples. This is not merely to describe the relation to the *beyond being* but to demonstrate how the thought of this beyond refers to society: the *face to face* is not a 'beautiful experience'; worship, but the concrete event of the ethical. The thought of *beyond being* in Levinas would never subscribe to the existentialist "I find myself a thing amongst things" as a vision of ultimate reality, but it would to the emphasis on being "a man amongst men"; it is a thought which takes the external world seriously. Indeed, it sets about thinking the exteriority of the Other at the same time as attempting to forestall the reductive retrieval of the Other by comprehensive thought. The *face to face* (in Levinas' text) is a "difficult" thought to follow and one which takes us to the heart of (one of) the most important tasks of philosophy today, which is, in Levinasian language, to free ourselves of an "hypocrisy"; to heal the "rending of a world attached to both philosophers and prophets" (TI 24/xii). The *face to face* is also, in this same thinking, said to be the moment in which '*I*' *do not think at all - I listen*. I hear a *Saying* 'before' it is thought by me qua *Said*.

The face (in) relation:
the face to face

"The face is still a thing among things." (TI 198/172)
As such it can still be the object of a phenomenology which would attempt to think it in terms of a 'posited object'; an intentional noema relative to my noetic gaze. But the face, it can be argued, is an intentionality in reverse: I encounter it as what looks at me - the face is a "noema without a noesis". I am aware of the face of the other as a face before I am aware that I am a face, too, and for the other. It is the case, therefore, that the experience of the face is always within a face to face relation, but it is also true that there is an asymmetry in the *face to face* in so far as my experience of myself as face occurs only if I withdraw from the encounter of the face of the other. The 'I' and the Other are not equals in the *face to face*; the face of the Other is 'experienced' before the 'I' has time for reflection; before I am me - and it would therefore be claimed - prior to thought. The experience of the face is originary, but not in the sense of archè, a concept belonging to ontological metaphysics. From what has been said above, the reader will have more than an inkling of the manner of operation of this apparent contradiction in Levinas'

work. The face is only ever experienced in the *face to face*; in a relation between the 'I' and the Other. The *third party* interrupts the *face to face* but yet plays a crucial role in the representation of the *face to face* as a relation between two. (See below) The *third party* signifies reason and the social. Reason only knows the face in the same way it knows anything else; for reason the face is indeed a thing among things, at best it 'knows of' the Face (i.e. face qua Other). Within the *face to face* the relation between the terms is ethical rather than epistemological. The relation between the 'I' and Other in the *face to face* is neither immediate nor mediate; it is neither a communion nor strictly speaking a relation at all in so far as that implies two relata sharing the same, namely ontological, status. It is a "relation without relation" (c.f. TI 80,295/52,271). It is a relation entered into before the ontological determination of the terms arises. The difference between the two 'terms' is accounted for in ethical language, for example, in terms of obligation, and responsibility, as we have already seen.

Primarily at issue in Levinas' account of the *face to face* is how this relation can be thought and said at the same time.' The importance of this question has been made clear particularly by Derrida, as we saw in

the last chapter. Is not the *face to face*, which echoes the Husserlian emphasis on what is *lived* but not *known*, ultimately open to the very same criticism which Levinas himself makes of Husserl when he accuses him of having given himself the "freedom of theory"? In other words: if the *face to face* is such that it can be made the object of a theme, as it is in Levinas' text (of necessity), how can it be 'originary' in the sense he claims for it (or indeed in any sense)? This question would bring us back to a discussion of the theme in terms of history, and specifically with regard to whether Levinas goes back on the Heideggerian insight into historicism, which he once took to heart in his work on Husserl. Is not the Face simply absent, despite the implicit scare-quoting, which we reflected in the discussion of the *trace* in the last chapter? Is not the *face to face* relation destroyed in each thought of it? These are some of the questions which we shall explore in this chapter. In doing so we will see how the thinking of Levinas progresses in movements which may appear to be 'circular', but which, in reality, are not equivalent to a linear exposition, not even one bent back into a circle. The deepening of the exposition undertaken by Levinas which defies linearity, is faced with the difficulty of representing a movement which does not (itself) have time for reflection (nor can it be reflected). It is therefore

an essentially speculative thought ³ for which 'staying with its subject matter', is a keeping up with it, a 'running commentary' - a staying with the thought of the Infinite without arresting that thought, which is pure movement, an absolute transcendence. Let us begin our examination of the place of the *face to face* in Levinas' exposition by recalling the images of it, provided in TI.

Images of the face

If the face of the Other in the *face to face* is the face of any Other (and considering that it is not Levinas' aim to provide criteria for deciding what is and what is not *Face*), then it may seem strange that he provides us with examples of particular faces at all. In giving an account of the "ethical relation", the *face to face*, Levinas seeks above all to describe the ethical height ⁴ of the Other, elsewhere described in terms of the asymmetry of the I- Other conjuncture, and to show how before the face of the Other the 'I' is put into question. We shall say more about this in a moment. The faces Levinas draws our attention to in specific parts of his account are those of the poor, the widow, the orphan, the destitute, all

of whom are "strangers". He also draws our attention to the face of the "teacher", or "master"; the Face is instruction. A further example of the *face to face*, which we shall consider below in reference to our discussion of the role of the *third party*, is that encountered in *Eros*. Let us consider first the faces of the stranger and teacher.

Firstly let us note that the image of the poor, the widow and the orphan - the destitute are emotively more powerful images in a general account of responsibility to ones fellow human beings than say that of the fat, cigar-smoking capitalist or truncheon-waving riot-policeman. Once again we find ourselves touching on the question of the use of pathos in Levinas. Prior to exposing the legitimacy of presenting these examples one can only say that in so far as what Levinas is doing is "phenomenology", then the experience of the face of the destitute is the appropriate experience of the ethical on which to focus. In a similar manner one could question the centrality of the phenomenon of anxiety in Heidegger, claiming that an analysis of joy could be shown to be of greater ontological significance. Without going any further with this digression, which surely indicates the road to an empty relativism, we wish only to point out here that the

'legitimacy' of focusing thought around an 'experience' in phenomenology can only be measured by what it enables philosophy to go on to show.

The face of the destitute is the face which disrupts the 'I' at-home-with-itself (chez-soi). The ipseity of this 'I', we remember was accomplished in relation to the element; in relation to the other (autre), which can satisfy its needs. 'Then' the Other appears on the scene:

"The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the *idea of the other in me*, we here name the face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum - the adequate idea. It does not manifest itself by these qualities, but *καθ'αυτο*. It expresses itself" (TI 50/21)

In facing the Other the 'I' learns that the idea of the other it has is inadequate to the Other. This is the point at which the central notion of separation can be seen to signify in two directions at once: the "insular sufficiency" of the I, its ipseity, marks its separation from existence, the other in general, but it learns, in facing the Other, that this otherness on which its separation is founded is merely derivative, a

mere idea, of the alterity which it now faces. It is the face which "teaches the infinity from which this insular sufficiency is separated." (TI 216/191) The second direction in which separation signifies is, therefore, in relation to the Infinite. 5

In Levinas' 'system' the *face to face* is the centre through which his entire analyses flow and to which they return. Its centrality in his thesis reflects the status he attributes to this 'experience' as it is lived; he calls it "the ultimate situation" (TI 81/53), experience *par excellence*. He makes it the origin of language and meaning (TI 206/181). Significantly, when we examine this centrality we find that it is actually a de-centering of the self, of consciousness, of the noetic act of self-identification, and a severing of the noesis and the noema - it refers to the arrival on the scene of an Other which "is by itself without reference to system" (TI 75/47). This de-centering refers to the asymmetry of the *face to face*; the *face to face* is not a relation among equals. The sovereignty of the subject is only to be found in its relation to existence, as we have seen, at the "level of life". This is not the "level" at which the encounter with the Other takes place. It is precisely the sovereignty of the subject in its relation to the other that the Other disturbs in facing me. In his essay Transcendence and

Height, Levinas calls this putting into question shame:

"The event of putting into question is the shame that the I feels for its naive spontaneity, for its sovereign coincidence with itself in its identification as the Same."⁶

Although the ethical relation is not a relation between equals, it is asymmetrical, the uniqueness of the 'I' is as equally important as the alterity of the Other in the *face to face*. Were this not the case then then there would be no adequate sense in which the responsibility engendered in the *face to face* could be said to be *mine*.

"The epiphany of the absolutely other is the face where the other challenges me and commands through its nakedness, through its destitution. It challenges me through its humility and from its height...the putting into question of the same by the Other, is a summons to respond. The I is not simply conscious of a necessity to respond, as if it were a matter of an obligation or a duty about which a decision could be made; rather it is *in its very position* responsibility through and through." (op cit ibid)

This is another clear indication of how separation introduced in the account of the 'I's accomplishment of its ipseity, can now be seen to be 'constitutive' of the uniqueness of my position in face of the Other and therefore makes the responsibility in question *mine*.

Levinas gives a name to this situation of the 'I': he calls it election. Elected, in the *face to face* "I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow and the orphan only in giving or refusing". (TI 77/49)

The images of the face to which Levinas gives pride of place, aim to show that the encounter with the Other is not an experience of threat and fear but one of my unlimited responsibility in face of the demand which the Other places upon me. The face of the hungry, therefore, is not an arbitrary choice by Levinas, nor for that matter is it Face in the ultimate sense, because it is in his and in this text, obviously a schema to aid understanding rather than an instance of an actual *face to face*. The face of the hungry is the example chosen because it is, in an important sense, more representative of the Face (even though the Face cannot be represented at all). Hunger, it may be said, in an instant, goes beyond the political causes of hunger in general; the hungry one places a demand upon me and not upon society. (We shall turn to the role of the social in relation to the *face to face* below). The demand placed upon me in the *face to face* is not a threat not because the Other is weak but because it is the nature of my responsibility with regard to this demand that is older than the moment in which the 'I' identifies itself - as me. Before I am me I am

responsible for the Other: to be me is to have already withdrawn from the primordial *face to face*. In the Instant in which the Other faces me, I do not return to myself as in the moment of self-identification, I take up an orientation toward the Other, *face to face*. This orientation toward the Other can be said to be 'older' than the identification of the 'I' because the movement Levinas earlier called "the upsurge" of the subject into existence is essentially a movement toward the Other, even if it were taken to be merely a relation to the other in the reflective act of consciousness - the thought of which the self-identified 'I', in folding back upon itself, is capable of. Separation of the subject in relation to the element is the condition for the *face to face* because it secures the separation from the infinite other, the Other. The *face to face* is not a *communion* between the 'I' and the Other, but it was already entered into before the 'I' folded back on itself: the ethical relation is older than the terms that constitute it. A proposition as acceptable or unacceptable as the notion of the anterior posteriori.

Levinas not only presents the face of the stranger and destitute as a paradigm face of the Other but also describes the very condition of being in the world as Other a strangeness- destitution (*étrangeté-misère*), he says: "Existence *καθ' αὐτό* is, in the world, a

destitution". (TI 75/47) The Other appears as face, stripped of all attributes, qualities and form - it does not appear as such. It is pure nakedness, says Levinas: "nudity disengaged from every form, but having meaning by itself, *καθ' αὐτό*, signifying before we have projected light upon it " (TI 74/47)

Through the descriptions and repetitions and reiterations of metaphors in all this, Levinas is not struggling to describe the experience of what it is to be Other in the world as if it were possible to literally speak from the 'perspective' of the Other. It is also clear by now that in attempting to give an account of the *face to face*, his discourse no longer takes the form of a phenomenology appropriate to the description of the ego - an egological phenomenology, such as was employed very effectively, for example, in EE, in describing the substantivity of the subject. If speaking from beyond being means anything at all in Levinas, then it is a speaking from within the *face to face* and in so far as he attempts to do this he is clearly not involved in a phenomenology of the face. Since the Other is not an *alter ego* for Levinas, it is not surprising that the attempt to account for the beyond being is beyond the scope of 'egological phenomenology', which is only ever, Levinas would say, a reflection restricted to the domain of the

same. The other qua Other is only encountered in the *face to face*. The question then is: how can one speak from within what is claimed to be the ultimate relation, a relation between two. Again this is an issue we can refer back to Derrida's general objection that the Infinite cannot be thought and stated at the same time. With this we have jumped backwards and ahead, and before we go on to consider the relation between the *third party* and the *face to face* we shall reflect first on the other image of the face employed in Levinas' account, namely, that of the master or teacher.

If the images of the face that Levinas presents us with are intended to convey the *height* of the Other and the demand placed upon us in the *face to face* then, the face of the master or teacher might seem an obvious choice for representing the height of the one above the other. A teacher is ahead of his pupil and can guide him. In so far as Levinas' remarks about the face of the teacher and teaching figure in his overall critique of ontological metaphysics that ensues therefrom, they are above all a rejection of philosophical dialogue as maieutics.

"Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain." (TI 51/22)

I neither learn infinity from the Other nor learn to discover it within me; as in Descartes Third Meditation, the Infinite thinks itself in me.

"The Cartesian notion of the idea of the Infinite designates a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it. It designates the contact with the intangible, a contact that does not compromise the integrity of what is touched. (TI 50/21)...In its non-violent transitivity the very epiphany of the face is produced."
(TI 51/22)

What is so apposite in my *face to face* with the teacher is that he addresses me, he speaks (first) and in so doing introduces me to something which is entirely new; "he opens other perspectives (and) brings us to a notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and power." (TI *ibid*).

In speaking to me the Other teaches me his alterity, not as a fact but because the epiphany of the face is the coincidence of the "revealer and the revealed" (TI 64/35f), the teacher and the teaching (TI 70/42); he reveals himself *καθ' αὐτό*. Polemicising against Heidegger, Levinas opposes the notion of revelation to disclosure, which, he says, is always disclosure in a

borrowed light, because it always refers to "the horizon of him who discloses" (TI 64/36). For similar reasons Husserl's account of the relation to Others would also miss true alterity. This is one of the points in VM at which Derrida seeks to demonstrate that Levinas fails to respond to a certain limit of the language in which both his critique of Husserl and his account of the ethical relation are presented. He says:

"Levinas...speaks of the infinitely other, but by refusing to acknowledge an intentional modification of the ego - which would be a violent and totalitarian act for him - he deprives himself of the very foundation and possibility of his own language. What authorizes him to say infinitely other if the infinity of the other does not appear as such in the zone he calls the same, and which is the neutral level of transcendental description?" (VM 125) (my emphasis)

It is interesting at this point to consider what sort of criticism this is. Is Levinas being criticised for not making the infinitely other appear? Something which he is at great pains to demonstrate is not appropriate to the 'nature' of the Other, and a demand whose legitimacy the entire discourse on the face challenges. And what is the authority to which Derrida refers here if it is not the authority of the logos? And finally may we make a similar observation to the one made by Derrida in relation to Levinas' reading of Husserl, a few pages earlier in VM, when he implies that Levinas overlooks the sense in which Husserl had already

addressed himself to the issues at hand *vis a vis* the Other: *Derrida's discourse at this point is inscribed within Levinas' thinking on the face.* ²⁰ Of course to say more about this one could turn to no better source than the Derridian corpus itself where the entire problematic of being inside or outside of a discourse is dealt with perhaps more explicitly than anywhere else. Throughout, Levinas is quite insistent that in the *face to face* the terms "absolve themselves of the relation" (ibid); both the same and the Other preserve their integrity.

The *face to face* is the origin of language. And it is in speech that the ethical relation is paradoxically held both to be effectuated and the relata are said to absolve themselves from the relation. Levinas seemingly freely uses such expressions as the "origin of language" and "origin of meaning" that we, having learnt from Heidegger and Derrida, tend to be allergic to. In the last chapter we suggested that Levinas might have been more careful in his choice of terms, given that some can be shown to be exceptionally forceful in perpetuating the *totality* his thinking seeks to defy. On the other hand, without making the force of onto-metaphysical language the theme of his work, without thematically seeking out the role of the notion of archè in totalising metaphysics, for example, he does

go to great lengths in his elliptical descriptions of the *face to face* to show the sense in which, in so far as it can be said to be the origin of language/meaning, this is in a non- or *an-archival* sense.³ Similarly, although he does not make the authority of the *logos* his theme, this could not be more directly challenged than by the account of the *authority* of the Other, expressed in the "ethical language" which imposes itself. What is it to articulate this notion of 'ethical authority'? And what is the significance of this articulation for philosophy as such? It is my aim in this thesis to show how these two questions belong together in Levinas and what their belonging together is held to signify.

Levinas' account of the *face to face* as the origin of language exhibits, perhaps one should say 'maintains', an ambivalence, or an irreconcilability of 'perspectives' appropriate to the radical asymmetry he holds to be characteristic of the I - Other conjuncture. On the one hand the 'first word', addressed by the Other to me, puts my sovereignty, my freedom, into question by suspending it with the command : "Thou shalt not commit murder" (TI 199/173). A command which announces the limits of my power - namely their restriction to the domain of the same. This command comes from on high; it is magisterial. On

the other hand, in the *face to face* as it stands in relation to the Stranger, which we described above, the response of the 'I' to the demand placed upon it restricted the freedom of the 'I' but did not suspend it: the 'I' is "free to give or refuse" (TI 77/49). In the first version the response appears to be that of the Other - a response to a threat, in the second, the response appears to be that of the 'I' confronted, for example, with the face of the hungry. Is the axiological asymmetry subtending the *face to face* here on the point of collapsing into a mere dissymmetry, that is, a contingent dissymmetry? To answer this question let us consider further how the language of the *face to face* refers to thematization and recall what we said earlier ¹⁰ with regard to Levinas' account of the necessity of thematization.

In Ch.2 we were concerned with the part of Levinas' account which conveys the sense in which the totality was breached - how it was possible that totalisation was not complete. If Levinas' analysis came to its conclusion with this thought then he would be a thinker of the *breached-totality* ¹¹ rather than the *beyond being*. The thought of the *beyond being*, centered on the *face to face* holds that it is only because the absolute alterity of the Other is guaranteed that the other qua Other is not annihilated within the thought

of ontological metaphysics, but is preserved as a trace

We can look at how the two images of the face function in relation to one another, now, and at the same time see how the *face to face* refers to the world. 12

"I can recognize the gaze of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan in giving or refusing; I am free to give or to refuse, but my recognition passes through the interposition of things. (TI op cit. my emphasis)

...Teaching does not simply transmit an abstract and general content already common to me and the Other. It does not merely assume an after all subsidiary function of being midwife to a mind already pregnant with its fruit. Speech first founds community by *giving*, by presenting the phenomenon as given; and it gives by thematizing."

(TI 98-9/72) 13

My response might be to give bread which would equally be to speak. Speech, like the face itself, which Levinas says is pure expression, is and is not of the world. Discourse - *face to face* - does refer us to the world, and it does so on the basis of a *signifying* which never becomes a signification; the Other does not present himself in a theme: "...the first teaching of the teacher is his very presence as teacher" (TI 100/73) His non-thematizability is the 'condition' for discourse which, of necessity, passes through the interposition of being(s). We shall come back to this at the end of this chapter.

Things, Giving and Objectivity

Passing through the 'interposition of things', it might be thought is inappropriate to the *face to face*, as we have been led to understand it: it is after all said to be a "relation without relation" (TI 80/52, 295/271) and things are essentially relational.¹⁴ Levinas' discussion of things both in EE and TI occurs in a polemic against Heidegger's notion of Zeug and Zeughaftigkeit and das Worumwillen as presented in Being and Time, §15, 16 & 18. In EE¹⁵ and TI the thing was described in terms enjoyment, living from... (in which things are 'ends in themselves'). This account belongs to the phenomenological analyses describing the substantivity of the subject. In the section entitled "Objectivity and Language" in TI, the polemic against Heidegger's thinking of Zeug is continued, but this time the emphasis is on the difference between the thing as it enjoyed by the subject and the means by which it attains its objectivity. Objectivity, says Levinas,

"...is posited in a discourse, in a *conversation* (*entretien*) which *proposes* the world. This *proposition* is held between (*se tient entre*) two points which do not constitute a system, a cosmos, a totality." (TI 96/68)

We can see here the sense in which the thing is a *gift* : the thing is a proposition put forward in discourse, whose originary form Levinas calls the *face to face*

It not surprising that if Levinas is going to call the *face to face* the "origin of language" then there is also going to be a sense in which it is the origin of the thing and indeed everything. What then does his polemicising against Heidegger in this context achieve? Firstly let us recall that Levinas wants to show the manner in which the *face to face* relates to 'the world'. But to do this involves taking up a critical distance to the dominant 'totalitarian' thinking of the world and the worldhood of the world, of which, for Levinas, Heidegger is the most advanced proponent. His own understanding of the Infinite is not a *supplement* to Dasein's ecstatic dwelling in the world. In so far as he speaks of the Infinite within the finite, which he also seeks to express in terms of the concrete relation to the human, then he has to have some way to mark out his own sense of the finite from that of the tradition, and this is part of what is going on in his polemic against Heidegger at this point.¹⁶

The formula which thinks the *face to face* as that which breaches totality is in fact an inversion of what is

actually being claimed: the *face to face* is older than the 'realm' of being, it is therefore more accurate to say that the *face to face* is interrupted by the interposition of things. But seen this way around, from beyond being, the interruption does not appear as that which fatefully prevents the *face to face* from occurring ; it is not prevented from 'completing itself' as is the totality - seen from the side of the totality itself. This is the meaning of the difference between the finite and the infinite in Levinas.

Setting aside the question of the 'legitimacy' of the polemic against Heidegger ¹⁷, what does it aim to establish? As we saw in Chapter 2 Levinas challenges the idea that meaning comes to the world through the *Sinngebung* of the subject in favour of the I-Other conjuncture. In relating the *face to face* to 'the human' Levinas obviously wants to distinguish precisely between the world of things and the social world in which the plurality of Others is governed by reason. It is on this referring of the *face to face* to society in Levinas' account that so much seems to depend. It is crucial in relation to philosophy because it is only in thinking the relation between the finite and the infinite that it can free itself from the alternatives of the blind repetition of the metaphysics of being and mysticism. ¹⁸

Within his own account, what is at stake is the possibility of justice, which does not itself belong to the *face to face*; justice is 'in view of' the Others, a 'perspective' represented in Levinas by the *third party*. In "formal logic", there is of course a contradiction here, perhaps the contradiction and with it the entire concept of contradiction. Its 'resolution' is not, however, what Levinas is seeking. His account attempts to show how the contradiction only arises and is given a negative value in ontological metaphysics, in the time of the logos. The sense of the Infinite within the finite, in Levinas, requires the maintenance of the integrity of the *face to face* as a relation between two and yet the integral reference to the *third party*. In the images of the face we have examined up to now, those of the stranger and the teacher, which show the face to be both *demand* and *command*, we are at the same time reminded that the Face has its point of reference in the human (face). That the problem of the infinite within the finite, refers to the human, is expressed in the following way in TI:

" To posit the transcendent as stranger and poor one is to prohibit the metaphysical relation with God from being accomplished in the ignorance of men and things. The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face." (TI 78/50)

The Infinite (God, the divine) must pass through the human ('realm' of being) and the "interposition of things" as we mentioned above. This is a good point at which to reflect on the way in which the priority of the ethical involves a reinterpretation of the phenomenon. We see the sense in which even things and the meaning of things (their 'thingness') is to be referred to the ethical - "ethics is older than ontology". Making the divine pass through the human does not, however, demonstrate the necessity of the human for the divine. Moreover, as Levinas stresses at various points, in particular with reference to Descartes thinking of the Infinite in the Third Meditation, the thought of the infinite starts from me, from the idea of the infinite in me. Not to show this necessity would be, despite the fact that things and thingness, for example, are claimed to have an ethical meaning, to think the *face to face* starting from the Infinite, which, if that can be said to have a 'meaning' at all, is mystical. It would be a communion with the Infinite but would not guarantee justice. Justice is guaranteed by the presence of the *third party* to the *face to face*. He seeks to show how reason, or rational society, is paradoxically already governed by the thought of the face - the idea of the infinite:

"The art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means - politics - is henceforth enjoined in the very exercise of reason. Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté..." (TI 21/ix)

And yet politics can also be the absence of war, for example, in the form of commerce, which is *warlike*, but nevertheless a peace in which "the Good has already reigned" 19

"Only beings capable of war can rise to peace (TI 222/197)
War...can only be produced where discourse was possible:
discourse subtends war itself..." (TI 225/200)

War can be thought of as the absence of peace, but not vice versa. The notion of (messianic) peace here is not a 'state of being', nor is it thought as such; it is in a time which is time-out from being, in the gap between what is now and what is yet to come, in the postponement of future being; it is *otherwise*. That "Violence can aim only at a face" (TI *ibid*) does not in anyway diminish the "ethical resistance" of the face to violence, because it always has time to do so (in each Instant, c.f. Ch.2). To examine further the sense in which reason is not merely a contingent supplement to the *face to face* but that without it the ethical relation would be but a "mystical communion"; that it is a relation effectuated not "in the ignorance of men" but "beginning from me", let us look now at a third figure of the *face to face* - Eros.

Eros and the *third party*

The analysis of Eros in TI is somewhat surprising. The relation to the Other in Eros is seemingly less than the *face to face* because the desire I have for the Other, being a satiable desire, is what Levinas regards as need as opposed to metaphysical Desire. On the other hand, in so far as it refers, but negatively, to the society from which it is a withdrawal, then it is a deficient mode of the *face to face*. Why is much of the account of the erotic relation to the Other described 'negatively' within a consolidation of the formula which posits the face of the Other as the "intersection of the divine and the human" ²⁰ at the same time as declaring the feminine (i.e. face of the Other in Eros) "presents a face that goes beyond the face"? (TI 260/238) Why is there a lack of exteriority in the relation to the *feminine*, to the point where the *feminine* is not to be regarded as Other? ²¹ And the relation to the *feminine* as a "dual egoism"? (TI 266/244)

In TI the discussion of Eros proceeds into the discussion of fecundity and time. In the context of this chapter, however, we are examining the account because it also serves to demonstrate how, in Levinas'

thinking, the relation to the Infinite requires the supplementarity of reason: as we cited above - that "the divine opens forth from the human face." In so far as Eros "excludes the third party" (TI 265/242), does it represent the temptation and the attempt ²² at accomplishing the metaphysical relation to the Infinite without passing through the human? This would seem to be a false assumption not least because Eros is certainly to be described as a relation to at least one other 'human being'. The predominant terms used to describe the "pure experience" of the erotic are voluptuosity and profanation. The experience is said to be a profanation because it represents "the revelation of the hidden as hidden" (TI 260/238). We recall from above that Levinas opposes disclosure "in light" to revelation, which is a revealing prior to objectification.²³ Although the account of Eros does not speak in the terms of sensibility and enjoyment which were used in the account of the identification of the subject, and although my relation to the other person in Eros is not to be reduced to that of my relation to "anonymous existence", the notion of a relation to the other prior to objectification described there bears significant similarities to the "pure experience" of voluptuosity, and we shall look at these in a moment. Levinas makes this quite explicit

in the section preceding the discussion of Eros entitled "The Ambiguity of Love", when he says:

"The possibility of the Other appearing as an object of need while retaining his alterity, or again the possibility of enjoying the Other, of placing oneself at the same time beneath and beyond discourse - this position with regard to the interlocutor which at the same time reaches him and goes beyond him, this simultaneity of need and desire, of concupiscence and transcendence, tangency of the avowable and unavowable, constitutes the originality of the erotic which, in this sense, is *the equivocal par excellence*."

(TI 255/233)

The most peculiar thing about the account of Eros is that it introduces an ambiguous figure of the face which is immediately described as a deficient mode; it is a face which "fades" and in contradistinction to the expression associated with the face earlier, the face of the beloved is "non-signifying". Consistent with the claim for the primacy of the ethical, Eros must, of course, ultimately be related to the *face to face* 'positively' and that is to be seen in its relation to fecundity²⁴, and, somewhat equivocally, both within Eros itself and in Levinas' account, in voluptuosity. But it is its 'negative' signification, or rather, non-signifyingness that we are more interested in here. Levinas calls it femininity. (Of course to distinguish between the two nodes of the *equivocation* is an abstraction that the erotic moment will not tolerate,

further below we shall characterize it as the withdrawing of the 'I' from profanation - as a re-establishing of ethical rectitude; orientation to the Other qua face.) By considering the non-signifyingness of the erotic relation, we can better understand the positive role of the *third party* in the *face to face*. We can see how Levinas thinks of the presence of the *third party* within the *face to face*, not as a destruction of the *face to face*, but, on the contrary, as being necessary to its status as expression, or signifyingness.

Why does not the erotic at least express the love of the lover for the beloved? Levinas says that in a certain sense it does express love but "it suffers from an inability to tell it" (TI 258/235). The carnal is pure vitality in which "the body quits the status of an existent", and again the comparison is invited between a certain mode of being of the subject in relation to the anonymous existence of the there is (*il y a*) 'without' the subject, and the relation to the other in Eros. Let us recall briefly the analysis of insomnia in EE in which the subject's substantivity is reduced to the point where, in the night of insomnia, the distinction between subject who "watches" in the night and the night itself disappears, such that one might say that it is the night which watches;

"In this anonymous nightwatch where I am completely exposed to being, all the thoughts which occupy my insomnia are suspended on *nothing*. They have no support. I am, one might say, the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought..." (EE 66/111)

It is a moment in which all intentionality is suspended. In the discussion of Eros, Levinas associates the "searching", groping intentionality of the erotic with this reduction of the subjects' substantivities ~~as~~ to the point of their disappearance as such. It is a movement, like all movements of the subject in this sense, towards the other, which, as we have learnt, is ultimately related to the ethical. The erotic, like the hypostasis of the subject is a movement prior to thought, a movement thought only 'afterwards'. The erotic, however, unlike the general movements of hypostasis, is at the outset a movement towards the other qua Other, and it is in this fact that its *equivocation* lies: I relate to the other qua Other but *not yet* as face. The erotic is an "aspiration" which "stays in the midst of essence" (OTB 177/224); it is a relation to the Other in his being as other: equivocation. It is a falling away from the *face to face*, a falling away from discourse and therefore "lacks seriousness" (TI 263/241). We can see this in the way in which the meaning of the caress differs in Eros compared to the caress within the *face to face*.

Firstly let us say that the caress of the consoler ²⁷ and the caress of Eros, are essentially similar, are both a movement towards that to which I am in relation before I move at all; before I am me. What the two caresses have in common is that they are a form of participation in being. The erotic caress, however, lacks the "sincerity of intentions" ²⁸ characteristic of consolation. It *begins* as a movement toward the other/Other, but never gets beyond the other it enjoys. It is therefore selfish, a kind of self-seduction in voluptuosity. ²⁹ It is a movement outward from self, which will *return to self* but one whose return is suspended in a moment of blind experience of the other. It lacks therefore the orientation taken up in the *face to face* proper. The signifyingness of the subject slips away to the extent that its substantivity is indiscernable. That is what we meant when we said that Eros lacks exteriority - "exteriority defines the existent as existent" (TI 262/239) - it lacks the exteriority of the existent which is accomplished in its taking up a position qua substantive. Eros is therefore not the ethical relation but neither is it a totalising relation. The discussion of Eros enables Levinas to make it quite clear that it is only a being (ie the existent) capable of the *face to face* that can also be capable of murder: "violence can only aim at the face". It can only *be aimed* at a face by the

substantive subject, the existent, whose separation is already a fact. As we have seen, this implies that "the Good has already reigned" because only the separate existent can be attentive to the prohibition against murder-which is language.

"Language source of all signification, is born in the vertigo of infinity, which takes hold before the straightforwardness of the face, making murder *possible and impossible*." (TI 262/240 my emphasis)

Just now we described the movement in Eros as a return to self which has within it a moment of suspension. The *return to self* is in effect the readoption of the *face to face* following the interruption of its respite from ethical responsibility and "seriousness". In speaking to the Other, the erotic is made possible *as such* in a theme. The erotic caress turns into a caress akin to the caress of consolation, it becomes for-the-other, even in mutual two-way caressing - a caress which is a looking the Other in the face, where the *third party* already "looks at me in the eyes of the Other"

(TI 213/188)

We have already noted how the *third party* in Levinas' account represents variously, society, reason, and justice. We shall now look in greater detail at its precise signification. Let us recall briefly that the

account of the subjectivity of the subject, its relation to existence gave us a subject capable of a relation with transcendence. All along, of course, it is to be understood, this very thematization is only possible because the relation to transcendence is already entered into; it is 'older'. The thinking of this transcendence in Levinas is an "intentionality in reverse": To consciousness, thematization itself, and therefore everything that thematization can think, it appears that a 'reduction' is being performed in the direction of the Other, but from the point of view of the *face to face* this reduction takes the form of an interruption of this relation. The thought of *the other* starting from me, encounters the Other and understands that what it has taken to be its object is the mere derivative of the Other. In the same moment it learns that *thought* is not a form of access to the Other qua *experience*.. It is rather a falling away from the originary encounter with him. In relation to the *face to face*, language signifies in two directions at once: it effectuates the separation, or absolution, of the subject from the relation and it accomplishes the relation to the Other. In one formula the subject speaks - he "tells" the *face to face* to a third; he thematizes the *face to face* in discourse. In the other formula he *listens* In OTB this is given in the expression me voici which is not the utterance

of a subject as such, but indicates the moment in which the subject is as a mere accusative in relation to the Other. Language so described appears to have two distinct moments and significations: language as thematization and language as the originary locution prior to the sedimentation of thought. Originary obligation and the me voici are not inversions of one another; the 'I' and the Other do not 'take it in turns' to address each other as equals, they are to be understood in relation to the asymmetry of the I-Other conjuncture. That is why breaking off and speaking, for the subject is always a speaking to a *third party*. In the attempt to describe both moments of language and to distinguish between them, it sometimes seems that in TI Levinas is driving a wedge between the two as if thematization, philosophy, were merely a defective form of the originary speech of the *face to face*. In his later work, OTB, where the relation between the two is expressed in terms of the relation between the Saying (*le dire*) and the Said (*le dit*), this is much more explicitly not the case. (We shall come back to the shift in terminology between TI and OTB below). That thematization is not merely a defective form of speech in the *face to face* is made quite explicit, if indeed in a somewhat contradictory manner, in both TI and OTB in the account of the *third party*. It is apparently contradictory because in some places Levinas emphasises

the exclusion of the *third party* from the *face to face*. For instance, in the expression of the Other in the *face to face*, one of Levinas' ways of describing how the discourse of the *face to face* remains unseen by the *third party* (TI 201/176). To the *third party* the two in the *face to face* are equal terms whose meaning is derived from the totality in which they function (irrespective of whether the totality is a finite or an infinite totality). The *third party* does not perceive the asymmetry of the *face to face* (TI 35,251/56,229). In the analysis of Eros above, we saw how Levinas describes the absence of the *third party* as a pure experience or profanation and as the deficiency of the erotic in comparison with the *face to face*, in that it lacks a reference to society. In this contradiction we can see something of the role the *third party* is being called upon to play between the "violences of mysticism and history". Is the *face to face* compromised by the *third party*? Indeed, can the *face to face* be compromised without the claim for the primacy of the ethical collapsing? And, who is the *third party* in all this? These are the questions with which we shall be concerned for the rest of this chapter.

In the opening pages of OTB Levinas says that "In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of betrayal" (6/7). In the same place

we are warned against assuming that this betrayal is tantamount to what might be described as a "compromise" of the ethical relation. To ask whether the *face to face* is compromised by the presence of the *third party* would be to assume their equal participation in being, or, their being in the same time. This distinction is best understood in the context in which we have approached this question by returning to the example of Eros. The interruption of the erotic relation which was described as a return to self of the subject was a breaking off which results in the taking up of a position in relation to the Other and hence re-establishes the *face to face*. There seems to be a sense here in which in answering and in speaking to the Other I am the third party. This 'answer' is not the accusative me voici, which is one of Levinas' ways of expressing the 'response' within the *face to face*.³⁰ Within being the response to the other person is rational, it takes form within the "impersonal structures of reason" (TI208/183). Society is, nevertheless, referred to the *face to face*, precisely in being interrupted, in being thematized. It is, of course, "compromised" in being said, but in each instant, it is re-established. (See below here and in Ch.5)

"Like a shunt, every social relation leads back to the presentation of the other to the same without intermediary of any image or sign, solely by expression of the face."

(TI 213/188)

If there is an implicit contradiction in this account then it simply reflects the way in which the "impersonal structures of reason" by which society governs itself cannot 'resist' the demand for justice (cannot resist the demands being made) even if justice itself is not granted. That this demand can be heard in society is by the grace of the ethical resistance of the face, even in its refusal.

Levinas' account of the relation of the *third party* to the ethical relation changes little in his later work, OTB. Some of the terms most commonly used in this context are changed, for instance the *face to face* is rarely mentioned, instead the relation to the Other is expressed in terms of *proximity*, *approach* and *substitution*. These terms work together putting less emphasis on difference within the ethical relation. Signifyingness, or Saying emanates from the event of proximity qua relation and cannot be so readily misunderstood as the 'voice' of the Other. In fact proximity is so strongly associated with the movement of the subject to the neighbour, the Other, in approach, that that particular confusion is no longer

possible at all. He develops most notably the thinking of the subject as a pure accusative, in relation to an ordinary *obligation* and; me voici. These studies lead Levinas to propose a notion of absolute responsibility "to the point of substitution for the other". In this the *third party* is more clearly understood as the limit (OTB 157/200) of that responsibility I have for the other in the world; it represents the possibility of justice. However, the ambiguity of the *third party* in relation to proximity is still evident.

"In proximity a subject is implicated in a way not reducible to the spatial sense which proximity takes on when the *third party* troubles it by demanding justice..." (OTB 81-2/103)

The arrival of the *third party* is, in the first instance, an annihilation of the non-spatial asymmetry of proximity. The *third party* here represents symmetrical dealings between individuals in their pursuit of justice. Justice is called for precisely because the *face to face* occurs within a society of Others. Reason is that by which my responsibility, which is incalculable within the *face to face*, can be calculated in a world where responsibility (for the Other) is shared among the Others. The *face to face* both transcends this pluralistic society and yet occurs within it. Each interruption of the *face to face* by the

third party is a re-establishing of the *face to face* elsewhere (OTB 158/201, TI 213,295/188,271)³¹

In this it becomes clear that the interruption of the *face to face* by the *third party* is not a fateful capture of the *face to face* by totality, but the very means by which it escapes totalisation. The *third party* demands justice (OTB 82/103), and therefore represents the end to all idealism, even though it remains ignorant of this fact. The *third party* is not *in a relation* to the truth on which the calculations by which society 'deals out' justice can be said to be grounded. This 'truth' is beyond being, it is the Good beyond being, it is as orientation -----> (in a direction "starting from me" toward the other; said as orientation). It (is) <----- (in the other direction) Signifyingness, Saying. In other words and with no symbolic scare-quoting: thought from the perspective of the beyond being, the directionality of the signifying/Saying indicates its "ascendency" over the signified/Said, and the priority of ethics over ontology. This is what Levinas' location of the *third party* within the *face to face* means: without society and reason the *face to face* would not be a relation to the Other qua Other. In the terminology of OTB Levinas would say that the trace of the Other³² could not be traced. As in TI, in OTB the *third party* is what

introduces distance into the ethical relation (OTB 157/200), but whereas in TI the Other was characterized as the stranger, in OTB the use of the term neighbour does not so radically exclude the *third party* from the idea that he is another with whom the *face to face* can be re-established. The *third party* in OTB is not so readily interpreted as being an *absolute* outsider. The *third party* is both "visage and visible" (OTB 160/204); the same in the other, a situation Levinas also calls the one-for-the-other, and is said to be the very structure of proximity. It is thus that the *third party* marks by its own "permanent entry, into the intimacy of the face to face" (OTB *ibid*)³³, the extraordinary occurrence of the Infinite within the finite. But who is the *third party*?

The *third party* is not simply the other human being who approaches the two engaged in the *face to face*. The approach of the third does not signal a degradation of an initial duo into a trio, (OTB 159/203). It is not an empirical other. This at least was clear in our example of how the 'I' in its withdrawal from the *face to face* is itself a third party. And we might add now that in so far as "the other is from the first the brother of all other men" (OTB158/201), they are all neighbours to each other, not simply alongside one another and therefore are also involved in third relations. On the

other hand justice is enacted in the dealings between empirical subjects. To deny this would be to deny the entire thesis. It seems, the two way signification aspect of all the structures supporting, that is constituting, Levinas' thesis is to be found and re-echoed here once again: in so far as the *third party* is a structure of proximity it has literally no point of reference to the empirical, to society, but the *third party* does refer to the empirical in that it is itself the very referring of that proximity to society of empirical subjects in the form of a demand for justice. To grasp this we have to be willing to entertain both the thinking of the *face to face* and of the notion of proximity at once. The shift does not represent a turn in Levinas' thinking but a change in approach. We will make a short digression at this point on this theme, as it bears directly on our discussion of the *third party*.

TI attempts a philosophizing from within the *face to face*. In this thesis we are trying to show how this approach is to be assimilated to and differentiated from a broader understanding of thinking the end of philosophy. Chapter 3 was centered around the dialogue between Levinas and Derrida and Derrida's VM was described there as being "supplementary" to TI (in his own special sense of the term), precisely because it is

such a penetrating study of the theoretical "difficulty" (and perhaps the impossibility) of this thought. The difference of approach in OTB, partly in response to this, is, firstly, to use a terminology which is less (ontologically) metaphysically-laden, but more significantly, is more concerned to describe structures of subjectivity which, despite all 'objections' ³⁴, already indicate transcendence *from this side*. Most importantly, we should recall it is the thinking of the *trace* which, above all else, enables Levinas to think the "betrayal" of the Infinite within the finite; enables it to be thought *as such*. In OTB the notion of the neighbour refers to both the empirical and to the relation of proximity. The empirical other, the other person, demands justice but does not trouble the *face to face* because qua 'empirical' he does not know the *face to face*. The demand is here a demand addressed to equals, the others alongside. The *third party* does disturb the *face to face* in so far as he is also an Other. In proximity,

"The other stands in a relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question, for my neighbour. The other and the third party, my neighbours, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party" (OTB 157/200)

In this situation, says Levinas, the question arises as to what I have to do with justice and with it I 'come down to earth'. Here it is clearer than it ever could be in TI that the limit of my responsibility is not simply that in the empirical world an infinite responsibility is unbearable. Perhaps giving the impression that Levinas sought there to describe the superiority of the *face to face*. In this account in OTB it is the disturbance of the ethical relation by the *third party* (which taken 'as a whole' is the situation of proximity) which calls me to my responsibility in society. That is the sense in which Levinas claims that this proximity, the ethical, is what founds (the being of) justice. And for that matter (in his sense of the term) the being of beings. It also gives us the sense in which we should understand the following remarks:

"Justice is at the origin of the claims of ontology to be absolute, of the definition of man as an understanding of Being" (OTB 191f.n.2).

and

"Order, appearing, phenomenality, being, are produced in signification, in proximity, starting with the third party. The apparition of a third party is the very origin of appearing, that is, the very origin of an origin"
(OTB 160/204)

Despite the differences of approach between TI and OTB, that they complement one another is clear from some of the concluding remarks of TI:

"The face to face is not a modality of coexistence nor even of the knowledge (itself panoramic) one term can have of another, but is the primordial production of being on which all the possible collocations of the terms are founded. The revelation of the third party, ineluctable in the face, is produced *only through the face*." (TI 305/282 my emphasis)

The face marks the "intersection of the human and the divine". It is not a metaphor, it is both the face of the empirical other and the face of the Other; pure Face. The relation between the two is thought, in Levinas, otherwise than on the basis of the ontological difference. 36

Levinas' 'empiricism'

We have seen in the account of the substantivity of the subject and its hypostasis (Ch.2), how the quasi-phenomenological descriptions there aim to account for various existential structures at a level prior to that in which they are *reflected* in consciousness. For example with regard to dwelling (TI 152f/125f):

"The event of dwelling exceeds the knowing, the thought, and the idea in which, after the event, the subject will want to contain what is incommensurable with knowing" (ibid)

The discussion of dwelling in TI is part of the account of the subject in terms of his being-at-home-with-himself (*chez soi*); his interiority. Is the discussion of dwelling metaphorical? Does it work in the way a metaphor works to help us think something which is conceptually distant - interiority - by means of something which is near - the home? Undeniably, it does at least do this, but it is also true that this the thinking of this 'metaphor' goes in both directions at once. Does it not also work as a deepening of our thinking of the home in human existence?

"The analysis of enjoyment and *living from...* has shown that being is not resolved into empirical events and thoughts that reflect those events or aim at them 'intentionally'. To present inhabitation as a becoming conscious of a certain conjuncture of human bodies and buildings is to leave aside,

is to forget the outpouring of consciousness in things, which does not consist in a representation of things by consciousness, but in a specific intentionality of concretization...The whole of the civilization of labour and possession arises as a concretization of the separated being effectuating its separation. But this civilization refers to the incarnation of consciousness and to inhabitation - to existence proceeding from the intimacy of a home, the first concretization." (ibid)

The rejection of the empirical here is very reminiscent of the phenomenology by which one moves from the ontic description to the ontological. And indeed, we see in this passage an instance of Levinas using his understanding of the ontological difference: the being of the existent being referred to a level prior to its reflection in consciousness. The empirical is thus referred to its meaning in relation to the 'subjectivity' of the subject rather than to world perceived by consciousness. It is therefore not a rejection of the empirical but an affirmation of it at a 'fundamental level'. Dwelling is not understood to be a metaphor for interiority, they have an 'existential' meaning in relation to one another.

"Because the I exists recollected it takes refuge empirically in the home. Only from this recollection does the building take on the signification of being a dwelling."
(ibid)

The event of habitation visible to consciousness is secondary to the event of habitation as a structure of the hypostatic subject, and it appears in this formulation that one arrives at the latter by means of a reduction of the former. However we may see this, what is important is that they are the same, in the sense that this reduction as such occurs entirely within the same.

The "reduction" in the direction of the Other in terms of the Said---> Saying, from the Signified---> Signifyingness, is of a different nature because it moves from the same to the Other, but nevertheless it bears a resemblance to the reduction outlined above with regard to its handling of the empirical. We shall examine this notion of reduction in the form of an *unsaying of the said* in detail in the next chapter. Before we do that we shall consider the suggestion that at bottom Levinas' thesis is open to the charge of being an *empiricism*, which like all empiricisms forgets that the being of language has its own dialectic, has a being of its own. Or, as Derrida puts it when presenting the suggestion at the end of VM: "Empiricism is thinking by metaphor without thinking the metaphor *as such*" (VM 139).

The charge could for example be directed toward the central notion of the face, when he says such things as: "The face...*is* by itself and not by reference to a system" (TI 75/47), or when he emphasises how the face is not a metaphor (op cit), and in the description of the face as *καθ' αὐτό* (eg. TI 51/21); pure expression, and the *face to face* as experience par excellence. In association with these kind of remarks, as we have seen in the placing of the *third party*, Levinas is quite explicit that neither the face of the Other in the *face to face* nor the *third party* are to be mistaken for empirical others. In OTB Levinas specifically warns against mistaking the original communication of the ethical relation (which he does actually call conversation in TI) for a dialogue between empirical beings ³⁶. Despite all this and in apparent contradiction to it, there is a very profound sense of relation to the Other going through the relation to the other person in all of Levinas' work, to the point where one might say that this is *what it is about*. ³⁷ Sometimes the spanning of the empirical and the transcendent is made a theme, for example: "Separation ...*is not only* an empirical fact" (TI 173/148 my emphasis). Derrida's assimilation of Levinas' thought of the Infinite to empiricism is on the basis of his simply not having the thought of Being.

"From his point of view, the origin and possibility of the concept are simply not the thought of Being, but the gift of the world to the other as totally-other" (VM 148)

In fact throughout VM Derrida attempts to demonstrate how, not having the thought of Being, Levinas presupposes the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl which he seeks to put in question (VM 118f), confirms Hegel as soon as he speaks against him (VM 120) and

"By refusing, in TI, to accord any dignity to the ontico-ontological difference, by seeing in it only a ruse of war, and by calling the intra-ontic movement of ethical transcendence (the movement respectful of one existent toward another) *metaphysics*, Levinas confirms Heidegger in his discourse: for does not the latter see in metaphysics (in metaphysical ontology) the forgetting of Being and the dissimulation of the ontico-ontological difference?"
(VM 142)

Derrida sees this absence of the ontological difference in Levinas' thinking of being as committing him to a thesis which, ironically, in seeking the Other beyond Being, actually implies the unthinkable unity of truth and Being can be thought, and that this is the thinking which is traditionally called metaphysics. To speak of a *beyond* this unity is therefore to resign oneself to an "incoherent incoherence".

"...the true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the 'logic' of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the a prioris and transcendental horizons of language, is *empiricism*." (ibid)

The achievement of Levinas' thinking would therefore not be to have given us the thought of the *beyond being*, but to have renewed empiricism and inversed it "by revealing it to itself as metaphysics" (VM 151). It is very interesting to note that despite Levinas' lack of the ontological difference, according to Derrida, he is in all but name, here being accredited with having carried out a very Heideggerian meditation on 'metaphysics', albeit without realising it. Caught like a fly in a spider's web without knowing it. For the spider as much as the fly, the web is all of thought. Derrida actually speculates on the proximity of their

"...two 'eschatologies' which by opposed routes repeat and put in question the entire philosophical adventure issued from Platonism. Interrogate it simultaneously from within and without, in the form of a question to Hegel, in whom this adventure is thought and recapitulated." (VM 149)

The difference between the two thinkers (or are there three, four or five at issue here - representing the entire history of thought (and its other) and

difference in general, is to be thought in terms of their thinking of the necessity of "an *irreducible* conceptual moment, and therefore a certain violence" (VM 148 my emphasis). This is what Derrida more than anyone has given us to understand. Indeed, is this not from among the readings proffered in VM, what is most irreducibly Derridean? He is correct to say that Levinas would not deny this necessity and therefore this "certain violence" ³⁸, but the "reduction" from the Said to the Saying in Levinas' later work, as we shall examine in the next chapter, is in fact a denial of the supposed *irreversibility* ³⁹ of the conceptual moment.

Finally let us juxtapose two thoughts which will give us, if not convince us of, the Levinasian understanding of the *ethical neutrality* of the movement of the concept (through) history

"...empiricism has always been determined by philosophy, from Plato to Husserl, as *nonphilosophy*: as the philosophical pretention to nonphilosophy, the inability to justify oneself, to come to one's own aid as speech."
(VM 152)

"The difference between 'to appear in history' (without a right to speak) and to appear to the Other while attending one's own apparition*, distinguishes ...my political being from my religious being." (TI 253/231)
(* ie as *third party*)

In various places we have recalled how in Levinas language is both the 'breaking off' from what he here refers to as the 'religious', that is, being in relation to the Other, and the 'accomplishment' of that relation. We have also seen how the *interruption* of the ethical relation by the *third party*, described as the demand for justice, produces the interminable recommencement of the ethical relation and the appearance of justice in a pluralistic society. Language, speaking, in Levinas' account is not, and does not pretend to be a justification of the oneself, nor is it a coming to one's own aid. The onself in Levinas already has the structure one-for-the-other, and the "first speech" is what is *heard* by the oneself.

Derrida's 'conclusion' in VM (i.e. the final reading in the text), therefore, that in Levinas' "empiricism" we see a classical inversion of metaphysics which only repeats metaphysics, albeit exposing the metaphysicality of metaphysics, the religiosity of the religious, the metaphoricity of metaphor, etc., consciously or unconsciously on the way (which is a metaphysical distinction itself), misses the sense in which the two moments of language are seen as an "undoing" of conceptuality, a dethematization of the theme. Derrida is saying that Levinas' thesis shows that metaphysics has been a search after the being of

beings, this much has Heidegger's student learnt, but without accepting, or understanding the thought of the ontological difference. He therefore repeats metaphysics (as did Hegel for example according to Heidegger's Concept of Experience, which we looked at in Chapter 1 and as does Heidegger, according to Derrida in Ousia and Gramme). In his later work Levinas responded to this criticism, not by adopting the ontological difference into his thinking, but by thematically addressing himself to the reversal of conceptualisation mentioned above, thought of as an Unsayng the Said (dédire du dit), and expressed in other terms such as dethematization, undoing, retraction, reverting. This is a continuation of the project of TI which the following, from the preface to TI, demonstrates, and which is surely about as un-Hegelian a remark about "the preface" as one can get.

"The word by way of a preface which seeks to break through the screen stretched between the author and the reader by the book itself does not give itself out as a word of honour. But it belongs to the very essence of language, which consists in continually undoing its phrase by the foreword or exegesis, in unsaying the said, in attempting to restate without ceremonies what has already been ill-understood in the inevitable ceremonial in which the said delights." (TI 30/xviii)

CHAPTER FIVE

OPENINGS

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The Opening of Opening

Levinas' thinking of the Other claims in TI to represent a breach of the totality of ontological metaphysics. It indicates a fissure in the text of that metaphysics; an opening on the beyond of metaphysics. This breach of totality, however, is not to be thought of as the contingent effect of a thought which goes toward the other and in doing so accomplishes this breach, such that a 'slip' could result in an irreversible moment of absolute totalisation. It is implicit in Levinas' account that the totality is in fact, in certain moments, *absolute*, but also *reversible*. It is absolute in so far as it is conceived within the tradition, but this does not mean that it is not *resistable* by the Other. The totality is absolute but, in relation to the Other, finite. Philosophy, thematization, is one form, perhaps the form of totalisation. It occurs with a *necessity* with which we are by now familiar. In what sense does this thematizing thought fail to complete the totality and permit the *trace* of the Other to appear in metaphysics? We want to show how in Levinas, thematized thought is not so much *reversible* as already a *reverse movement* relative to the transcendence toward the Other. Transcendence gives rise to a perspective which thinks

thematization in reverse and sees it as an "undoing" of the representation of being in themes. We wish to indicate how Levinas' thinking does not break with philosophy in a sense that would involve denouncing thought as thematization, and therefore, as we put it above in various places when interpreting Derrida, "driving a wedge between thought and language". The thinker would only wish to denounce metaphysics if he failed to distinguish between philosophy as totalisation and philosophy as the voice of the totality itself. Philosophy occurs necessarily as totalisation, but it only *necessarily* leads to totality as such if it understands this necessity as the unity of (truth and) being. This is precisely what the thought of the transcendence of the Other in Levinas challenges. The distinction can be thought in terms of the difference between metaphysics and the metaphysician. ' The metaphysician is not commanded by the necessity of what his thinking thinks, he is interrupted by the Other in that meditation and experience thus transcends the difference between what is thought and what is outside of the thought of the same. Levinas' thinking

"...seeks to be understood from within a *recourse to experience itself*. Experience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience: the passage and departure toward the other; the other itself and what is most

irreducibly other within it: Others. A recourse not to be confused with what has always been called a philosophical enterprise, but which reaches a point at which an exceeded philosophy cannot not be brought into question... (it designates) a space (which is) a hollow within naked experience ...this hollow space is not an opening among others. It is opening itself, the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category or totality, that is, everything within experience and which can no longer be described by traditional concepts, and which resists every philosopheme." (VM 83)

In Chapter 1, in our cursory examination of the meaning of the end of philosophy in the thinkers referred to there, we saw how the notion of *reversal* figured in each. In our reading of Levinas we have seen how he understands the reversal in thinking as a reversal of the priority of ontological metaphysics over "ethics". His account describes the thinking of the same as totalitarian and accounts for a movement or thinking which breaches the totality describing its 'movement' in the other direction, and is a movement which is older than ontology. This movement Levinas calls 'transcendence', a term held to transcend the distinction between and noun: the Other is (a) Transcendence. The reversal articulated in Levinas' thinking is not merely an abstract term referring us to one branch of philosophy amongst others and a valorising of it. Nor is the claim for the

priority of 'ethics' based on the identification of any 'historically' decisive moment within metaphysics as such. It refers us, ultimately, to the experience of the Other, or rather it never leaves the site of this experience. In so far as this is true of Levinas' thesis it is indeed a 'phenomenology'. The ethical in Levinas' sense does not represent a rejection of history but a transcendence of history which respects the necessity of history, and therefore metaphysics as ontology. We have seen what form this claim takes and it marks a further similarity between the thinking of Heidegger and Derrida, for example, and Levinas, rather than a difference. It is by referring us to the ethical relation and by placing this notion at the centre of his thesis that Levinas' thinking attempts to distance itself from the thinking which accepts the necessity of the tradition, and the role meditating on this necessity plays in relation to the the end of philosophy, but which still thinks it in terms of the unity of Being. In preserving the unity of Being at this point, thinking foils its own attempt to accomplish a *decisive reversal* of the tradition - the very gesture by means of which it envisages its future. Levinas draws our attention to the ethical neutrality of the thought of Being and relegates Heideggers' thought of ontological difference to the thinking of the same. He does something similar in his short

commentary on Derrida's thinking ², where, whilst praising the rigour of deconstruction, accuses it of "failing to recognize the signification effected by the very inconsistency of this procedure". ³ Throughout TI, it is in view of and against Hegel's thinking, in particular, that in his reading of Descartes the subject is resurrected. This sweeping gesture is supported in that work only by a handful of elaborate phenomenological studies, a Cartesian meditation on the Infinite together with a developed thinking of the *trace* and a meditation on the face. We have seen above how these relate to one another in Levinas' work. We have also appealed to passages in the later work, OTB, in our elucidation of several aspects of Levinas' thesis originating in earlier works. This cross-reference is possible because, as we have said, the shift in OTB is a shift in approach and emphasis rather than aim, in response to the reception TI received and, in particular perhaps, that of Derrida.

A recurrent concern in Heidegger scholarship is the theme of the relation between his later and earlier work; whether or not the shift represents a break or a continuity, or how the early work undertaken in BT was a necessary ladder to the later meditative work on language and what significance is to be drawn from the fact that Heidegger abandoned the project of what was

to have been Section 3 of BT. There is similarly a significant relation between Levinas' later work, OTB, and his earlier work TI in that the later work bridges a gap between the tradition and the claims for the ethical put forward in the earlier work. We are suggesting that there is a sense in which this reflects the relation between philosophy and its other, which his work as a whole attempts to describe. Speaking from beyond being, as TI apparently attempted to do, is complemented by the work of OTB which provides more explicitly the 'way back' to philosophy. We've seen how Levinas' thinking of the *trace* is central to this. The work of OTB is not, however, a regression; a withdrawal from the claims for the ethical relation. In fact in speaking of the 'way back' to philosophy what is actually involved here is the recognition of a movement that is already in reverse. It could be said, therefore, that the 'way back' is also a movement of transcendence toward the Other. The difference of emphasis then between the work of TI and OTB is the difference between talking about Transcendence *as such* or the Other *as such*, for which Levinas was strongly criticised, by Derrida among others, and talking about transcendence as a "movement" toward the Other. This difference is a recurrent structure if not a theme in Levinas: the "amphibology" between verb and noun. Strange as it may seem this structural aspect of the

two major works taken together seems to reflect the claim for the *anarchy* of the ethical relation. In other words, the philosophical account of the movement toward the Other makes the Other older than the origin of this movement, which is the logos. To compliment and compensate for what might have been taken for a traditional emphasis on the presence of the Other, the *denominated* Other in TI, in OTB Levinas shifts the emphasis onto the *verbal* movement of transcendence. At the same time, as we examined in Chapter 3, the thinking of the *trace* serves to disrupt any understanding of *presence* of the Other in history as *simple presence*.

In Chapter 3 we mentioned the difference between the Heideggerian/Derridian notion of history as rupture and Levinas' interruption of history in the Instant. The notion of time as a series of Instants remains implicit in OTB, but there the emphasis is on the *diachrony* of Saying, which is to be distinguished from the *synchrony* of the Said (see below). The Instant, it might be added, in this context is the time of the Saying and gives rise to the non-coinciding of the subject with itself (it will be recalled from Chapter 2).

" This being torn up from oneself in the core of one's unity, this absolute non-coinciding, this diachrony of the

instant, signifies in the form of one-penetrated-by the-other." (OTB 49/64)

Saying is a signifying which does not become a signification. For Levinas philosophizing at the end of philosophy is (should be) a form of reduction of the Said (signification) in the direction of the Saying. This reduction, beginning from the Said, the speech of the same, leads back to the Saying, which is not the speech of the Other, but has the structure of the Other-within-the-same.

In TI the description of philosophizing as a reduction of the thematized was less an issue than *that which* cannot be represented in a theme, but nevertheless it was posed (as a theme), for instance when Levinas speaks of "thematization turning into conversation" (TI 51/22). The conversation here is not only the conversation of philosophers and the claim is general. It is one point at which the closeness to life of Levinas' thinking is very striking. The reversal of ontological metaphysics occurs in the form of a relation to another person, in each Instant, it is not held to herald another 'epoch', but the (infinite time of the) Other; a time (to be) for the Other.

The Saying and the Said

The account of the relation between the Saying (le dire) and the Said (le dit) in OTB⁴ continues the task undertaken in TI of describing the anteriority of the ethical relation to any thematic representation. In OTB, in a section entitled the "Saying without the Said", Levinas says:

"This saying has to be reached in its existence antecedent to the said, or else the said has to be reduced to it. We must fix the meaning of this antecedence. What does saying signify before signifying a said? Can we try to show the crux of a plot that is not reducible to phenomenology...Saying signifies otherwise than as an apparitor presenting essence and entities." (OTB 46/58-9)

There is a sense in which the account of the relation between the Saying and the Said is a theoretical abstraction in relation to the general account of the movement towards the Other. It is after all, in Levinas' text, a philosophical account and therefore the Saying, in so far as it appears in the account, appears qua Said (even though it is there called the Saying.) Philosophy is essentially a denomination of what is and a representation of the relations between quiddities. The Saying, it is said, implicitly refers us not to the quiddity of he who speaks but to his

quinsnity. ⁵ The quinsnity is in effect the horizon of the Saying. An example of this is given by Levinas when he says that the "first teaching" of the teacher is his "presence" (c.f. above). The notion of 'presence' being appealed to here is *epekeina tes ousias* and implies the unicity of the one to whom it refers. Levinas sometimes calls this *illeity*, a term we met earlier in the discussion of the trace. Levinas, like Heidegger, believes that philosophy contains within itself the key to going beyond a meditation on the quiddity of beings. Unlike for Heidegger (if we accept the claim) in Levinas, the antecedence of the *epekeina tes ousias*, or let us say *opening* ⁶, requires the absolute exteriority of the Other. Like Heidegger, Levinas believes that philosophy does not know this *opening* ⁷ but, contrary to Heidegger, Levinas believes that a meditation on the opening, which gets underway through the passage granted by the ontological difference, represents the most extreme rejection of the Other. This thinking is closed to the Other, because it thinks both the same and the other on the basis of the common denominator - Being. The excess of the Saying over the Said which 'remains' outside of its philosophical determination is the measure of its exteriority. It is the 'I' of diachrony, the "non-coinciding" 'I' to whom the Saying is addressed. And in this I-Other conjuncture the Other says his exteriority

to an 'I' that can *hear* it. This is not an *experience* as such^a nor is it an empirical fact^a, and it should by now be clear that the Other is not an empirical Other as such at all. The experience or event of the ethical relation is at no point being presented as something appropriable by me qua empirical individual - and as such a basis for a good morality. One does not arrive in a face to face relation by means of a meditation on the meaning of the reduction of the Said to the Saying. One always already is or has been in a face to face relation, something Levinas does not tire of repeating, and which may sometimes appear as the most unreflective of empirical observations. Once again being in the *face to face*, reluctantly, perhaps misleadingly, appeals to a 'presence', but thought beyond being. The *reduction* proper is not, however, theoretical, it is 'real', and as soon as Levinas attempts to express this then it becomes clear that having understood the theoretical representation of this relation (and either accepted or rejected it) does not guarantee our being able to follow the account of the reduction, as if the thinker could by means of a series of logical steps, proceed toward it. The reason for this 'difficulty' is that the true direction of the *movement* of reduction is from the Saying to the Said, it only appears the other way around *in philosophy*. The reduction cannot then 'be followed', where this gesture

is associated with a logic which moves in steps of increasing explicitness. If we want to follow the reduction at work in Levinas' text then we find that the decisive moments are accessible only through a meditation on such statements as, "Obsession...undoes thematization" (OTB 101/128), or, "...the thematized disappears in the caress..." (ibid 191f.n.10), or, "Phenomenology can follow out the reverting of thematization into anarchy in the description of the approach." (ibid 121/155). This language is not simply tangential to the sobriety of the theoretical, but is an instance of the "abuse of language" ¹⁰ by which the Saying allows itself to signify within the Said. It is not that the metaphysician abuses language as if to trick it into expressing non-logocentric thoughts, he participates in the abuse which language invites in the "wreckage" of a discourse in dissemination. ¹¹

Talk of the relation to the Other as a movement in reverse; as a reduction ¹² from the Said back to the Saying is a kind of supplement to the unsystematic meditations on *approach*, *proximity*, *substitution*, the *caress* etc. Its presence as a kind of theoretical supplement in OTB is partly a response to a demand, voiced most notably, by Derrida. It is also a living illustration of what it seeks to thematically represent: it is a Said which bears the trace of a

Saying. The extraordinary thing about the trace of the Saying is that at the same time as the Saying 'appears' within the Said it appears as the trace of something which is more than the Said can contain and in relation to which the Said itself is secondary. This is extraordinary because the Said, despite this 'secondarity', represents our only (theoretical) access to the Saying, and yet by definition cannot be adequate to this task. Despite this 'restriction', which corresponds to what we referred to earlier in various places as the *limit* of language, about which the thinkers referred to in this thesis are concerned, Levinas insists that his aim is to show that to "hear a God not contaminated by Being is a human possibility"¹³. At the same time he shows us that starting from the Said, the logos of being, is the only 'way' for thinking to *approach* the Other. To make a step on this way, which does not simply produce another Said then the Said (which is a Saying which has suffered a reduction in the ordinary sense ¹⁴ of the word) must at the same time be an *unsaying* of the Said. This recanting (*dédire*) of the Said in its being said is a form of "effacing the trace" which we talked about in Chapter 3, here of the Said's *being said*, and as such is a movement 'backwards' in the direction of the Saying. This is the possibility Levinas insists on and attempts to describe.

The account of the relation between the Saying/Said given in OTB is again a structure which resonates with the entire diatribe of the general claim for the antecedence of "ethics" in relation to ontology. It is itself a restatement (redire) of the claim which at the same time seeks to describe the movement of transcendence in terms of a "reduction" of the Saying to the Said. It is perhaps better suited to demonstrate the interrelation of the two 'realms' than the accounts of the egological subject and the *face to face* were in TI. About which it is at least possible, if not in the final analysis legitimate, to object that the ontological realm, the same, is being transcended in the direction of a 'more fundamental' realm which is given the name "ethical" but which nonetheless can only be thought on an ontological basis. This would therefore signal the return of the same and not the Transcendence claimed. In OTB the discussion of the Saying/Said is better suited to expressing the notion of the other-within-the-same structure of transcendence. At the same time we see in it a further echo of the metaphor of "overflowing" referred to in Chapter 2 and in the discussion of Descartes Third Meditation.

Once again, in OTB, the movement begins from an account of the subjectivity of the subject, but this time it is

presented not from the standpoint of the self-interest of the subject in enjoyment, and the hypostasis of this subject in relation to the element, but aims rather to emphasise the sense in which the identity of the subject "comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility" (OTB 14/17). In Chapter 2 we examined the distinction that was made in EE and TI between the concept of identity in ontology and a notion of "identification" associated with the upsurge of the existent into existence. What we are now looking at in OTB is not a third account but rather the same thing again from the perspective of its *meaning*. In Chapter 2 we made clear that the movement toward the other (autre) in hypostasis is, on the basis of an antecedence we have tried to understand here, already a movement towards the Other (autrui); an orientation. In view of the diachrony of the subject out of phase with itself, Levinas describes this moment from the perspective of the Other, or conversely, from the perspective of the 'I' as pure accusative, as the time in which subjectivity is seen to have the structure of one-for-the-other - at its origin. Here, however, the term 'origin' refers to something which, relative to the time of identity, which is the time of the same, is *anarchical*.

The other-within-the-same structure of the relation between being and the *beyond being* is of course an ambiguity that is maintained and held to the fore in Levinas, it should never be thought that it is being presented as a problem to be resolved. Among the myriad expressions of this notion in Levinas, such as "overflowing" or the paradoxical *anterior posteriori*, one of the more religious sounding formulations in OTB is in terms of precisely this claim that to hear a Saying that has not already become a Said is a "human possibility". This is put forward at the same time as stressing that it at no point indicates a rejection of the necessity of ontology. Later we shall look at how the return of this paradox is understood as a kind of scepticism by Levinas. Before that we shall examine the "going backwards" of thought as an Unsayings of the Said (*dédire de dit*).

Unsayng the Said (1)

In various places above we have seen how the notion of "interruption" plays a significant role in the different analyses which constitute Levinas' thesis. For example in the interruption of history, of the 'I' chez soi, the breach of the totality as the interruption of essence by the *otherwise than being*, and the interruption of the *face to face* by a *third party*. Interruption as 'hesitation', as a 'suspension', indeed as a concrete possibility open to thought is a mark of the Husserlian in Levinas. It is its presence throughout his thesis which warrants his retention of the word 'phenomenology' as a description of what he's doing, as it is precisely this aspect of phenomenology that he regards as being essential. Once again now, in elucidating Levinas' philosophical description of the movement of transcendence as the Unsayng of the Said (*dédire du dit*), we must recall that the interruption is characteristically not merely within (the) time (of the Said), but of (the) time (of the Said). It effectuates a leap into a parallel time of the Saying (or in the case of the third party interrupting the *face to face*, vice versa, into the time of the Said). The specific direction of this transition is in any case 'theoretical' rather than real: the parallelism of the

two times just spoken of is merely a metaphor to aid the thinking of a duality which arises out of the non-coinciding of two different 'perspectives'. The metaphor of 'perspective' is the one we have used in various places above. The time of the same - the synchrony of the Said - is being distinguished from the time of the Other - the diachrony of the Saying. The question, as ever, is one of thinking the relation between the two, or more specifically, the manner in which the movement between the two is the transcendence of/toward the Other. What then is the nature of the *reduction* of the Said to the Saying towards which Levinas directs us?

Let us first look at the figures of this reduction as they are to be found in Levinas' work. We have already noted that the excess of the Saying over the Said can be expressed in terms of the 'presence' of the one to whom the Said is given, the one who remains outside of the Said (theme) ; the speech or the text ¹⁵. The recognition or appreciation of this 'presence', which is never made present as such (i.e. in a Said), nor is a simple absence awaiting presentation, is not a task for the thinker, but a fact of proximity. This 'fact' of proximity is not merely to be made the object of the inquiry, that alone is not the purpose of Levinas' drawing our attention to it. Referring the later

notion of proximity back to TI can be confusing, as without the idea that the subject is the pure accusative of the Other's Saying, it might appear that attending to one's own speech neither requires nor implies the transcendence of the Other. It is nevertheless to be seen in the following:

"The interpellated one is called upon to speak; his speech consists in *coming to the assistance* of his word - in being present." (TI 69/41)

We've already discussed this use and later avoidance of the term 'presence', and how it is not a predicate of either the interpellator or the interpellated here. We are not returning to this point in TI to restate this. Now we shall examine how this 'presence' inverts "the inevitable movement that bears the spoken word to the past state of the written word" (ibid).¹⁶ The inversion Levinas speaks of here is a kind of suspension which 'produces' this presence. It is a suspension subtended across the diachrony of the Instant. In Chapter 2 we spoke of this in terms of the non-coinciding of the subject with itself and we referred to the 'dialectic' of the Instant. The 'presence' of which Levinas speaks is, in a sense, the presence disclosed by metaphysics, ousia, but it is here being thought with a view to what gives rise to its being thought by ontological metaphysics. Levinas was less concerned to stress this

in TI than he had become in OTB. What his analyses collectively show, albeit without this being their stated aim, is the metaphysical notion of presence, ousia, in a state of being "undone" . We see this also in the following:

"The face is a living presence it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated...He who manifests himself comes...to his own assistance. He in each instant undoes the form he presents." (TI 66/37)

He undoes the form he presents, which is a theme; is Said. In OTB this reduction is formalised in terms of the relation of the Saying to the Said. The Saying is the anarchic 'origin' of the Said and a philosophizing is proposed which would be a reduction of the Said in the direction of the Saying. This reduction involves an Unsayings of the Said. It proposes a thinking which is a breaking up of essence. He says "*Esse is interesse; essence is interest*" (OTB 4/4) and sets out to describe a thinking which is a becoming dis-interested.¹⁷ The analyses in OTB are organised around an assemblage of metaphors which work together as a vehicle for this reversal. We shall briefly look further at some of these before questioning the ability of the mode of transport to deliver thinking over to the Saying, and indeed if this is what is intended.

Examples which are explicit, at least in what they state are such as the following:

"Responsibility reverses...the order of interest"
(OTB 12f/14f)

"The infinity of the infinite lives in going backwards."
(ibid)

"Obsession traverses consciousness counter-currentwise...It undoes thematization and escapes any...origin."
(OTB 101/128)

Other examples are explicitly associated with the insistence on what we have referred to throughout as the "necessity" of the relation between metaphysics and its other.

"(The Saying)...must spread out and assemble itself into essence, posit itself, be hypostasized, become an eon in consciousness and knowledge, let itself be seen, undergo the ascendancy of being. Ethics itself, in its saying which is a responsibility, requires this hold...For the saying is both an affirmation and a retraction of the said."
(OTB 44/56 my emphasis)

The signifying in which the Saying is heard is in the form of a retraction of the Said. Yet Levinas insists quite explicitly on a 'meaning' for the "Saying without the Said". It is indeed held to be, as we would put it in ordinary metaphysical language, the origin of

meaning. The reduction of the Said to the Saying is nevertheless not being presented as a recuperation of the Saying (which would be to regard it as an origin in the traditional sense). When Levinas says: "This saying has to be reached in its existence antecedent to the said, or else the said has to be reduced to it" (op cit), it appears that two alternatives are being suggested, but in fact these two refer to the amphibology of the transcendence which transcends the distinction between the verb and the noun. Levinas' account of the relation to the Other requires them both and thinks them in two different times.

Time and again this is a point of contention for Derrida. For any 'meaning' whatever to be attributed to the Saying qua *antecedent* to the Said, it is the very *necessity* of the Saying's being Said which must be interrupted, and this is not possible. Levinas would agree that this necessity (itself) cannot be interrupted, but he regards the demand for consistency on precisely this point as the demand of "formal logic", and therefore as what, more than anything else, is likely to precipitate a simple repetition of metaphysical motifs. For this reason he lets it ride. Derrida does not reject the notion of interruption as such but he interprets it differently. We broached this difference in Chapter 3 where we

referred to it in terms of the Derridian notion of rupture in comparison to Levinasian interruption. We come back to this now in view of several pages of Derrida's later essay on Levinas which can help us here. ¹⁶ He says there:

"Interruption is such that it will have torn the continuum of a tissue which naturally tends to envelop, close upon itself, resew itself and reassume its own tears and as if rendering them its own once more..." (ECM p.38)

The use of the future perfect here indicates a hypothetical time prior to the interruption - a time before the continuum is broken. On the other hand it implies that in reality the interruption has always already occurred, and the thought of the interruption has passed into the fabric of the continuum, marking it, namely with a trace of that past. A recurrent metaphor in Derrida is of the text (of) history as a torn and re sewn fabric. ¹⁷ Its having been re sewn is understood by metaphysics to indicate a past in which the fabric was untorn. This is not itself a metaphor that Derrida would object to, because it is merely a fact that metaphysics thinks its origin by means of this metaphor (and because this is a version of the metaphor of the origin, as he better than others has given us to understand). What is at issue is the question of the reappropriation of that past. It is the

meditation on this question which demonstrates very quickly the naivety of the metaphor and puts metaphoricity itself into question. In Levinas' notion of interruption he finds the thought that the

"...anterior future of the tear - as absolutely anterior past - will have made the seam effect possible, not the other way around. On the condition, however, of allowing itself to be contaminated, resumed and resewn in what it has made possible" (ibid)

Levinas' retention of the notion of the "uncontaminated" (by being) is metaphysical in Derrida's view much as the notion of Being without the ontological difference is. Once again Derrida is reminding us that Heidegger's thought of the ontological difference showed what was wrong with this thinking. As though Levinas had doubly misread Heidegger - firstly taking Being to be an excellent being and secondly by thinking that the purpose of drawing our attention to this difference was to make Being an object of thought. Is not Levinas' claim that to hear a God not contaminated by being is a human possibility ultimately subject to this criticism?

Derrida appears to be opposed to the idea of a singular, radical interruption; an interruption such as the one that in Levinas' Instant throws the subject

into the time of the Other. He argues that the only possibility for a thinking which interrupts its own becoming said is one which takes into account the inevitability of its becoming a Said, and therefore no longer has any need to talk about 'Saying' and 'origin'. That is not to say, however, that according to Derrida thought's taking into account the inevitability of becoming said implies its becoming the passive observance of its own becoming said. On the contrary, it must in a sense actively maintain the interruption by means of what, in ECM, Derrida refers to as a series, or what he elsewhere (e.g. Positions) has called a chain of substitutions, whose function is to defer the resumption (reprise) of the continuum as such. This series (of what we earlier called 'textual devices') is the only possible response to the constant "resewing of the seams" of metaphysics; the continuous reappropriation of the incisive, interruptive thought. In Chapter 3 we said that in Levinas there was no "decisive" interruption in the *historical* sense. What we referred to, a few sentences back, as a 'radical' interruption would represent the transcendence of history/historical time. In ECM, more clearly than in some other places, Derrida appears to be opposed to the notion of decisive ruptures of any kind, at least of any which are 'effectuated' in an active sense. The notion of the 'rupture' applied to historical epochs is

not decisive (or perhaps better to say 'incisive') in the appropriate sense, because it is neutral vis a vis the present moment. Derrida is, however, seemingly close to Levinas when he says,

"This resumption is even the condition for the beyond essence being able to retain its chance against the enveloping seam of the thematic or dialectic." (ECM 37)

This is precisely what was meant by the Saying "requiring the hold" of the Said as such (see above). Derrida represents the couple Said/Saying in terms of the logocentric Said and Said-always-being-interrupted. He cites Levinas on the Book (OTB 171/217) to demonstrate that Levinas' Saying should be understood, or can best be understood, as the trace of the Other borne by the intertextuality of discourse, namely, in the consequent production of signs bearing the trace of (a trace of) the Other. The metaphor of retying the text is the vehicle of Derrida's attempt to show this. The interruptions are marked by the 'knots' in the retied text, whose very presence is the mark of the Other which is never present in the text but of which they are the trace. This trace of the Other "must, therefore, be there, without being present, otherwise."

(ECM 39) ²⁰ Derrida attributes the multiple interruption to Levinas at the level of his text, but not at the level of his intentions. A peculiar move for

Derrida of all thinkers to make. It suggests, in effect, that Levinas' *Instantaneous* interruption cannot achieve the reduction it claims to produce.

"One sole interruption within a discourse does not fulfil its task (oeuvre) and lets itself be reappropriated."

(ECM 40) ²¹

Treating Levinas' text on these two levels at once, interweaving his own critical remarks on the interruption, interrupting Levinas' text in doing so, is itself a living example of the intertextuality we spoke of above. At times it is impossible to distinguish between what is of the Levinasian text and what is of the Derridian text. It could be described as a 'live performance' in which the absolutely other is produced.

"There is dislocation: the work (oeuvre) does not deport an articulation (énoncé) or a series of articulations, it remarks in each atom of the said a marking effraction of the saying, no longer in the present infinitive, but already a having passed (by) of the trace, a performance (of the) totally other." (ECM 37) ²²

For Derrida this performance involves a rethinking of the other in a non-metaphysical way but does not represent, as in Levinas, an attempt to think this other qua "uncontaminated". But neither does the 'production' of this other imply that the other so

thought is merely the effect of a self-rupturing discourse and therefore merely another concept. The absolute alterity of the Other is not contingent, as we said at the beginning of this chapter. Appearing otherwise than as a concept in the text of metaphysics this other is the trace traced in the withdrawal of the concept. This is indeed a point of contact in the thinking of Levinas and Derrida. We shall see now how it is the thinking of the trace in each which marks this point of contact. In ECM Derrida demonstrates the intertextuality of the 'contact' and the sense in which this relates to the production of the "totally other" within the text; within metaphysics. As we see from the text cited above, it also deals with the thematic of *reappropriation*; the representation of the interruption of the text in a theme, a Said. We shall return to this after a short digression on metaphor.

On Metaphor and the Reduction

In OTB the formulation of the relation to the Other in terms of the reduction of the Said to the Saying addresses the matter quite explicitly as one about language and *of* language. This is not something new: in TI, as we have noted, the relation between conversation and thematization is absolutely central to what is said there. The major difference in OTB is that the formulation functions quite consciously as a formalisation of what is going on in other elements of the text. Ultimately the question which remains is precisely: *What is it that is going on?* The question formulated in the Said transcends the Said in the direction of the Saying;

"One can go back to this signification of the saying, this responsibility and substitution, only from the said and from the question: 'What is it about...?' a question already within the said in which everything shows itself." (OTB 44/57)

Derrida introduces "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" (RoM) ²³ with a similar question.

"What is happening, today, with metaphor? And without metaphor what is happening?" ²⁴

We are going to look now at what bearing the question of metaphor has on our reading of the Un Saying of the Said in Levinas. We shall begin by suggesting that one of Derrida's most oft and most variously voiced 'reservations' about what Levinas is proposing can best be understood in view of his writings on metaphor. In particular, we suggest that in Levinas' account of the relation to the Other, more clearly than elsewhere in terms of the reduction from the Said to the Saying, Derrida sees a traditional view of the withdrawal of metaphor, by means of which thinking would be delivered over to this Other. This would roughly correspond to the idea that language qua metaphor is the means by which thought approaches what is distant through what is most accessible. The simplest of interpretations of the Saying might see Levinas' proposed reduction of the Said to the Saying in these terms, namely, as a rendering the Saying *accessible*; as if the Saying were something wholly contained within the Said. This way of thinking, however, would make of the Saying an originary Said, which is contrary to Levinas' entire project. In drawing our attention to a certain text by Heidegger, Derrida seeks to make clear how the entire question of metaphor is about the essential metaphoricity of language and, therefore, the manner of locating oneself within metaphor rather than of taking a position on metaphor. In places, such as the opening

pages of The Retrait of Metaphor, he actually demonstrates the uncontrollability of the texts metaphoricity by stylistically bringing metaphor to the fore. In this privileging of the metaphoricity of the text rather than the logical relations, which are traditionally held to be what constitute the text's intelligibility, we see Derrida, like Levinas, attempting to account for the absolutely other in metaphysics. This is the attempt to think this alterity otherwise than by means of the traditional conceptuality. The recurrent metaphor of overflowing, in Levinas' various works, which we have referred to in several places above, does something similar. The Saying is always something more than what can be contained in the Said, it is therefore radically *inaccessible* within the Said. The notion of accessibility here has everything to do with making intelligible. The reduction Levinas has in mind cannot, therefore, be thought of on a simplistic model of the withdrawal of the Said's metaphoricity. In his work the 'metaphor' of overflowing itself works to resist any such attempt. The inability of the Said to contain the Saying corresponds to the 'uncontrollability' of metaphoricity as such. It is a point at which we see the authority of the Said, the logos, not so much being challenged but being exposed in its inability to maintain authority; in its

finitude. It is in these terms that we see a 'contact' between the two thinkers Levinas and Heidegger, if not yet a 'dialogue'. It is in view of Derrida's reading of Heidegger's remarks on metaphor that this is best seen.

In "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" Derrida is out to show in what sense the account of metaphysics as the withdrawal of metaphor in terms of wear and tear (*Abnutzung*) is inappropriate and in any case wrongly attributed to him. He reminds us in RoM that it is the conceptuality or metaphoricity of metaphor that is his target. It is the withdrawal of the conceptuality of metaphor, metaphor as such and, paradoxically, by means of metaphor as such, that he demonstrates at work in Heidegger's thinking on language.²⁶ There is an order or level of *reduction* involved in this which, and this is part of Derrida's claim, either escapes current thinking on metaphor, or whose possibility this thinking is not willing to acknowledge.²⁷ This issue becomes one of accounting for this 'second-order' withdrawal, which is qualitatively different from the first-order withdrawal corresponding to the *Abnutzung* of metaphor.²⁸ In a sense the second-order withdrawal 'founds' the first before the first gets underway. This thought of Derrida's proceeds as an interpretation of Heidegger's thought of the withdrawal of Being: it is

the withdrawal of Being which creates the space for metaphysics as onto-theology. The paradox is that metaphysics bears the trace of the withdrawal of the very conceptuality which this metaphysics is and by means of which it thinks its own conceptuality as such. Derrida attempts to capture this paradox in metaphor (at the same time as thematically arguing that there is nothing aside from *metaphor*) often in terms of a topology of metaphysics, which he says is not circumscribed by:

"...a circular limit bordering on an homogenous field, but more a twisted structure which today, according to another figure, I would be tempted to call: 'invaginated'. Representation of a linear and circular closure surrounding an homogenous space is, precisely, the them of my greatest emphasis...I could multiply the citations from as far as Differance where it was said for example, that 'the text of metaphysics' is 'not surrounded but traversed by its limit...marked on its inside by the multiple track of its margin...a simultaneously traced and effaced trace, alive and dead simultaneously'" (RoM 16)

Such a topology is not representable nor is it meant to be as such, it is the conception of withdrawal in terms of 'linearity' that it precisely seeks to put in question. In another place Derrida attributes a certain linearity to the metaphor of overflowing in Levinas. He says;

"It is strange, is it not, that this excess which overflows language at every instant and still requires it, sets it in motion incessantly at the very moment of traversing it? This traversal is not a transgression; the passage of a cutting limit: the very metaphor of overflowing becomes unsuitable in so far as it still implies some sort of linearity.

(ECM 26)

We shall come back to this shortly. Before that we shall take a look with Derrida at the Heideggerian text on metaphor which is central to all this. The discussion revolves around Heidegger's remarks about language and the "house of Being". Derrida quotes from the Letter on Humanism, the sentence "Das Denken baut am Haus des Seins" - "Thought works at (constructing) the house of Being" (RoM 24), and comments on Heidegger's claim that

"Discourse about the house of Being (Die Rede vom Haus des Seins) is not a metaphor (Übertragung) transporting the image of 'house' toward Being, but [by implication: inversely] it is by way of appropriating thinking the essence of Being (sondern aus dem sachgemäss gedachten Wesens des Seins) that we will one day be able to think what 'house' and 'to inhabit' are." (RoM ibid)

Derrida sees in this a non-denominational thinking which aims to think, for example, 'house' and 'to inhabit' beyond their metaphysical determinations, beyond essence. It gives 'house' and 'to inhabit' back

to thinking by withdrawing their metaphorical representation as the empirical objects - house and inhabitation. These are no longer to be thought according to the "privilege of a name" ²³; they are to be thought *otherwise*. It makes of thinking these (things) a 'getting to where we already are'. What is the connection between the 'exposure of metaphysics to itself as empiricism' associated by Derrida with the Levinasian text, which we examined in Chapter 4, and this promise of a de-empiricisation of thinking in Heidegger? The question begs a comparative assessment of the *reversal* as it is to be found in Levinas and Heidegger, and goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in the final sections of this essay we shall indicate the direction in which this may take us.

Certainly both Levinas and Heidegger think the reversal as a reversal of the thinking of essence. But Levinas' notion of *the same* is used by him to give a reading of the ontological difference of Sein/Dasein such that it falls entirely within (it): a difference from within which the alterity of the Other is hopelessly and already radically excluded; out of which the relation of the same to this Other cannot emerge (for thought). In other words, for Levinas, Heidegger's reversal does not break with the thinking of essence. On the other hand we can speculate as to the proximity

of Levinas and Heidegger when Heidegger thinks the reversal such that thought thinks from the truth of Being to the nature of man as opposed to the preliminary meditation which approached the truth of Being through its special relation to Dasein. This does not suggest that a decision must be made personally on the part of the philosopher, the moment is 'historical' and coincides with the emergence of the thought of historicity itself. It is the point at which the thinker recognizes a reversal in the directionality of the thought of Being; the point at which the double genitivity of the *of* becomes meaningful for thought. It reminds us immediately of Levinas' "The infinity of the infinite lives in going backwards". This bears great similarity to what we in our analyses have described in terms of the "thinking in two directions at once", characteristic of Levinas' thinking from the "perspective" of the Other. In Heidegger we find:

"Every philosophical, that is, thinking, doctrine of the nature of man is *in itself already* a doctrine of the Being of the things that are. Every doctrine of Being is *in itself already* a doctrine of the nature of man. But neither of the two can be arrived at by the mere reversal of the other, through a dialectical manoeuvre..." 30

This indicates that the changed perspective in thinking after the reversal is not a substitution of one perspective for another, but rather a maintenance of

the two within the new perspective. This manner of one being maintained within the other is, however, to be distinguished from the Hegelian Aufhebung. The 'new' perspective is more originary, 'older', than the first. Here we see another model bearing great similarity to the one we appealed to above in our reading of Levinas. But once again we must point out that although this thinking of the ontological difference, expressed in terms of two-way directionality, is to be distinguished from Hegelian dialectic, for Levinas it remains, nonetheless, a form of dialectic of the interiority of the same closed to the absolutely other. We are not, therefore, on the brink of proposing a last minute reduction of Levinas' thought to Heideggerian motifs! As will become clear now as we return to the theme of the Unsayings of the Said.

Unsayings the Said (2)

In the last section we cited Derrida's remark that the metaphor of "overflowing" was unsuitable for representing the relation of the "excess" of the Saying over the Said because it implied a sort of linearity. It is hardly surprising that he says this when in RoM we learn the sense in which the very metaphoricity of metaphor is linear, metaphor being a concept of onto-theological metaphysics. In other words, no metaphor can 'represent' this excess without reducing it to a concept; subjecting it to metaphor. It is not that 'overflowing' is a weak metaphor, say compared to Derrida's own of 'invagination'. For the exposition of his own thinking, Derrida prefers figures which resist being read linearly. They resist in a way similar to that in which certain scenes of copulation in de Sade cannot be represented realistically, being physically impossible. The metaphor of overflowing, in comparison, is (as much as anything can be) straightforward, let us say traditional. It is not linked to Levinas' account of the ethical relation quite in the way that Heidegger's "language works at constructing the house of Being" is linked to his thinking of the reversal. Heidegger's 'metaphor' is a kind of 'speculative' thought more akin to Levinas' "Being is exteriority",

mentioned above. If one misses this then it is possible to go ahead and read Levinas' representation of the reduction of the Said to the Saying as if it proceeded according to a supposed linearity. This is not, we might add, what Derrida is out to do, but it is a point at which we might speculate as to his belief in the necessary presence of certain criteria to a discourse in order for it to be able to effectuate an "interruption" of a 'decisive' character. One criterion would appear to be the application of an acute authorial control over precisely such disruptive devices as the very self-consciously transgressive metaphor of *invagination*. It may be, of course, that the authorial aspect of this control is imaginary anyway, in which case its presence is merely ironic rather than logically problematic. Instead of 'authorial control' we might speak of a certain level of textual consciousness which, in its ability to turn language back on itself within the text, represents an "abuse" of language. Derrida talks of the "abuse of language" in relation to translation of Heidegger's *Entziehung* with the French word *retrait* (RoM 22), but the real abuse he is perpetrating, in general, is the abuse by which language is encouraged to deconstruct logocentric self-control. The resulting revelation to metaphysics of its own essential metaphoricity, or in other words, the impossibility of any meta-language by

means of which this control could be maintained, is a de-struction after which metaphysics can never be the same again.

In OTB, in several places, Levinas refers to an abuse of language which he associates not with the Unsayings of the Said, but with the being said of the Saying. In other words, in the terminology we have been using here: with the reduction in the direction of the Saying to the Said, which ontological metaphysics makes. As a general remark about the project of OTB he says:

"This way of thinking is against a philosophy which does not see beyond being and reduces by an abuse of language, saying to the said, and all sense to interest." (OTB 16/20)

The Saying appears in metaphysics, through being abused, qua Said. It is contrary to this abuse that the Unsayings of the Said works. The (self) abuse of language which Derrida elucidates in view of, and associates with, Heidegger's remarks on metaphor, has something in common with this abuse as noted by Levinas. The connection is to be understood in relation to differing conceptions of the reversal of thinking we have had in view throughout this thesis. Derrida's reference to the abuse of language, as we said above, refers us to the deconstruction (another word for undoing) of the authority of the logos. As we have just

seen in Levinas, the same term is used to express seemingly the opposite, namely, the Said's asserting its mastery of the Saying in the Saying's becoming Said - in philosophy.

"Philosophy, which is consigned in the Said, converts disinterestedness and its signification into essence and, by an abuse of language, to be sure, says that of which it is but a servant, but of which it makes itself master by saying it, and reduces its pretensions in a new said."

(OTB 126/162)

For Levinas the abuse is of the Saying - originary language - in its reduction to the Said. For Derrida the abuse can only be of the Said and in Levinas' understanding of the abuse, as being of the Saying, he would see the return of the traditional and in fact theological notion of the pure transcendental signification. What these views have in common is that the abuse they speak of is for both the self-abuse of metaphysics, which begins *of necessity* in the Said and results in what Derrida might call its falling apart at the seams. The difference is that beyond this auto-destruction of metaphysics in which Derrida generally sees an opening up such that it may be thought again *otherwise*, Levinas insists on the absolute transcendence of the beyond being, the *otherwise than being*. The abuse of language as the reduction of the Saying to the Said should therefore be distinguished

from Derrida's thinking of it as the auto-destruction of the Said, on the basis of the notion of Transcendence. We shall not here investigate the proximity of Derrida and Heidegger *on their own terms*, but we can briefly look at the sense in which, for Levinas, Derrida's reading of Heidegger's remarks on metaphor are indeed faithful to a notion of reversal proceeding as an 'involution' of the Said, to which Unsayings the Said is ultimately to be contrasted.

Of course it should be remembered that Heidegger has his own notion of the Saying (Sage) and in association with it the notion of proximity (Nähe) to Being: the two are united in the notion of Ereignis.³¹ But the disintegration of Being resulting from thought's being unable to provide the name for Being comes as no *surprise* to thought, in a sense we shall explain shortly. It may signal a break with the ontological conception of essence, but does not break with what Levinas calls the cosmos of *the same*. For Levinas the interruption of this totality was never its own possibility, so for him the reversal in Heidegger's thinking may be described as a change in perspective but it remains an alternative perspective still proper to the same. Heidegger's later discourse on the gathering of the Fourfold of Earth, Heaven, Gods and Men, would similarly be said to be a meditation which

does not break with the synchronic plenitude of the Said, even if one accepts that it gives us to think the gathering and the gathered there beyond the traditional empiricism. The synchrony implied in the very term 'gathering' is the time of the Said. Far from being a response to the incessant interruption of this time, experienced in my proximity to the Other, Heidegger's Heimkehr represents an involution of the same, an Einkehr. It might be objected or remarked that this resignation or enclosure of Heidegger's thinking within the same makes no attempt to express itself in terms of an internal critique, indicating that what it criticises is not being taken seriously. To this it can only be said that as the notion of internal critique is a part of the fabric of the totality of this meditation, it is precisely another possibility of the same. Consistently opposed to this is the notion of thinking as a response to an interruption which is not a self-rupturing of the same but has its origin elsewhere. Expressing the opposition thus it appears as if at every turn the failure to engage in a dialogue with Heidegger on his terms is defended by means of a very simplistic logical formalism, the very nature of which Levinas himself rejects as a relevant basis for critique. It is, however, not the case that Levinas' account of the absolute alterity of the Other is based on some logical objection to its inclusion within the

same. We have seen there how his thinking is related to other attempts to think the end of philosophy in terms of the Inside/Outside of metaphysics. What is in fact an attempt to remain faithful to the sense of the disturbance of the Other within metaphysics can too easily be mistaken for a stubborn adherence to a certain logic of interruption. What we have seen in Ch.s 2-4 is the manner in which Levinas' work combines a philosophical response to our thinking's being within metaphysics and a response to the 'phenomenon' of being's other. In his work the interrelation of these is revealed to be a 'response', in an ordinary sense, to the Other.

That the signification of the Saying is only to be heard qua Said signifies neither the completeness of the totality of the Said nor the positing of an ideality. The 'reduction' of the Saying to the Said, in the ordinary, i.e. traditional sense, can be seen to be secondary in relation to the reduction, going in the reverse direction, from the Said to the Saying. These are not merely two variations or two different perspectives on the relation of the Saying to the Said. The relation of the Saying/Said exhibits a radical asymmetry. As a matter of fact, what we could regard as 'two different versions' are precisely the account of the ethical relation in terms of the I-Other

conjuncture and this account of the relation of the Saying to the Said. This is part of what we have attempted to show throughout: the sense in which these two are contiguous rather than analogous. The impossible thought of the other of metaphysics is the ethical, for Levinas, irrespective of the terminology one chooses to express it in..

We can see this clearly if we consider further the many formulations of this gesture of "going back" to the Saying from the Said. This "going back" does not correspond to a linear withdrawal of the Said, but rather to a 'quantum leap' from the synchronic into the diachrony of the Saying. This is a time in which the Saying says prior to its becoming a Said. The Said which states this unsaid Saying would regard it as 'hypothetical', but this is precisely a name given to the Saying qua Said in synchronic time. Thought has a natural, or habitual, tendency to think the diachronic as a moment of the synchronic, but the two times are emphatically 'parallel' to one another. The Saying is not, therefore, the past of the Said in any sense which would imply its theoretical recuperability.

"This saying, in the form of responsibility for another, is bound to an irrecuperable, unrepresentable, past, temporalizing according to a time with separate epochs, in diachrony." (OTB 47/60)

That this 'past' is not representable explains why Levinas spends so relatively little time trying to describe it and why we were right to say that the account of the *face to face* in TI is not a meditation on a 'beautiful experience'. It is also why he says that the account in general of the relation to the Other will resemble negative theology: What this relation means 'positively' is only thought through what it is 'negatively'. Here we see evidence of how the terminology of the Said/Saying breaks with this metaphysical opposition. The Saying is approached by means of the reduction through thought's addressing itself to the disruption of the sovereign subject by the Other. The reduction is an "undoing" of thematization in *approach, proximity, obsession, and substitution*. These are the movements of Unsayings the Said and, in a sense, Saying is nothing more than the this Unsayings of the Said. The relation between the Saying and the Said is not linear - one does not pass from the Said to the Saying by means of the reduction. The excess of the Saying which 'overflows' the Said, which is in excess of the Said, is appropriated fully in the Unsayings, not in some ideal synchronic moment of a heard command - a pure Saying. The ethical relation, the *face to face* (itself) exhibits diachrony, a diachrony subtended by the asymmetrical difference

between the terms. The signifying of the Saying occurs in the break up of the totality constituted by the Said, which is the word of the subject qua same, and not in another 'realm'.

In all this we are surely not wrong to hear powerful echoes of Heidegger's thinking on truth as a-lethia, in which thinking is related to the unthought (Ungedachte) otherwise than in the mode of making it present. There is an apparently similar sense of "return" in Heidegger's thinking of a-lethia. We should, however, be wary of this apparent similarity, as where Heidegger is apt to call thinking Heimkehr, Levinas is emphatic that the approach to the Other is Abenteuer - a setting sail in the style of Ulysses for an unknown destination. Heidegger's thinking remains, despite his questioning of onto-theology, a "coinciding" of the oneself in its return; its journey is a spiritual "detour" which ends where it began, in certainty.

"...certainty,...remains the guide and guarantee of the whole spiritual adventure of being. But this is why this adventure is no adventure. It is never dangerous; it is self-possession, sovereignty, αρχή. Anything unknown that can occur to it is in advance disclosed, open, manifest, is cast in the mould of the known, and cannot be a complete surprise." (OTB 99/126)

The "complete surprise" Levinas is thinking of is not something that can be said, in fact that is part of what is surprising about it. It is the Other who surprises us by the very infinity of his transcendence. In TI Levinas relates this to the origin of language in the following:

"The Other who can sovereignly say *no* to me is exposed to the point of the sword or the revolver's bullet, and the whole unshakeable firmness of his *for itself* with that intransigent *no* he opposes is obliterated because the sword or the bullet has touched the ventricles or auricles of his heart. In the contexture of the world he is quasi-nothing. But he can oppose to me a struggle, that is, oppose to the force that strikes him not a force of resistance, but the very *unforseeableness* of his reaction... (this is) the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: 'you shall not commit murder'. (TI 199/173)

This surprise is constantly renewed, it is not *epochal*. It moves the *Unsayings of the Said* along like the motor of contradiction which propels Hegel's dialectic forwards. The difference is that in the former the future is not predetermined by the past, the surprise being the interruption of this very movement of time; of the future through the present to a past state. Perhaps better to say that the future itself is postponed in the Instant and along with it death, the

preoccupation of the self-centered subject. This is the time in which the subject can be for the Other; the time in which 'I' am in a relation to the Other before I am me. And yet, as we have said several times above, this *me* is, paradoxically, the starting point of this transcendence. That this is a paradox and remains one in this text and the texts referred to throughout, is perhaps of some significance in itself. As a concept belonging to the Said it seems to have a use within discourse on the relation of metaphysics to its other. In belonging to the Said it is itself dependent on what we have called "linearity". The paradox of the antecedence of the Saying, for instance, results from the linearity of chronology. That philosophy can live with this paradox (for it is never eliminmated as such) must be seen in relation to the way in which it is accommodated at the end of metaphysics. The repression of paradox in metaphysics is lifted, it is no longer regarded as a dubiously respectable name for contradiction. In Levinas one of the things that this involves is to not respond to the demands of *formal logic*. The Said and the Saying are in two different times, we have described them as 'parallel' above. It is said that parallel lines meet at infinity, but this metaphor does not fit what is being claimed for the relation between the Saying and the Said. Infinity is traced in the postponement of each interruption of the

Said, in each Instant. The interruption, this breaking through of the Saying in the Said is not a moment of appropriation of the Saying for thinking, for the same. It is the renewal (instauration) ³² and justification of the Said. The Saying breaks through as a founding (instauration) of the Said. Ethics thus renews ontology in the form of a constant calling to responsibility of the ontological subject.

Conclusions

The Return of Skepticism and Ethical Neutrality

"In having proffered the *epekeina tes ousias*, in having recognised from its second word (for example in the *Sophist*) that alterity had to circulate at the origin of meaning, in welcoming alterity in general into the heart of the *logos*, the Greek thought of Being forever has protected itself against every absolutely *surprising* convocation. (VM 153)

The logical enclosure of the other in logocentric metaphysics is nevertheless breached in each instant, and it is this fact rather than its logical impenetrability that is the starting point of Levinas' thinking. Derrida also puts it well when he says that what was taken for the solidity of metaphysics is in fact its rigidity and that its surface is severely cracked, and that Levinas' thinking moves along these cracks. ³³ Levinas' thinking in fact works at an opening of this metaphysics after which, in principle, nothing will remain the same. Strangely it reveals how the edifice never was whole, total, but is and has been ceaselessly interrupted, breaking up the time that holds being together. It penetrates metaphysics to its fundamentals and challenges it in its origin by proposing a pre-original opening of opening which opens

anarchically before being has time to gather itself into themes, which in turn form the fabric of the metaphysical edifice.

Levinas likens the notion of interruption to skepticism, which he calls "philosophy's legitimate child". Skepticism always returns despite its repeated refutation and prevents philosophy from having the last word.

"Does not the last word belong to philosophy? Yes, in a certain sense, since for Western philosophy the saying is exhausted in things said. But skepticism in fact makes a difference, and puts an interval between saying and the said." (OTB 168/213)

The "last word"; the "word of the end" is always already being undone in a going towards the Other. It is not exhausted in the Said because the reduction is, in the way we have described, *in reverse*. The Saying 'increases' as the reduction proceeds, beginning from the Said. Skepticism and logocentrism are not mutually exclusive, nor, and this is what Levinas insists on, is the former contained within the latter. At least not in any sense of 'within' conceivable by logocentrism (itself). Skepticism stands to philosophy as does the Saying to the Said.

Earlier in this chapter we juxtaposed questions of Derrida and Levinas: the questions "What is happening...?" and "What is it about...?". It may be that these are not *philosophical questions*, are not *philosophy's* questions - to borrow a sentence from Derrida. Whatever the nature of these questions they occupy philosophy such that philosophy cannot simply eject them from its house. Like skepticism itself they return with an "audacity" (to borrow a word Levinas uses in this context) such that philosophy cannot refuse them an audience. Both formulations of the question significantly betray the fact that the questions come 'after' and in response to that which is already happening. For Levinas this is the very significant fact of the antecedence of that to which philosophy is the response, namely, the Other. But this response is found to be already preceded by a response made prior to the expression of the response voiced in themes and in ontology. Levinas understands this to be contrary to the thinking which thinks the other of metaphysics through the ontological difference. The thinking of the ontological difference does not think Being as being other to thought and teaches that any attempt to do so must go via the impossible severance of thought and language. We have shown how the account of the subject's subjectivity in terms of its substantivity is the crucial thought in Levinas on his

way to giving an account of the relation to the Other qua Other without severing thought and language.

In these pages here we are guilty of pulling apart two parts of an account which, we are ready to admit, leaves both parts lifeless. This is the price paid for writing a thesis rather than something in the form of a futuristic 'engaged writing'. Perhaps we lack the audacity and the talent for that, but then there is a time and place for everything. This pulling apart of the text to which we are now confessing was, however, warranted and the perforations were clearly to be seen. We have already referred to them: the account of the Saying and the Said and the Unsayings of the Said, is almost like a theoretical supplement in comparison and relation to other elements which together constitute Levinas' claim for the primacy of the ethical. This supplementarity is not simple and we use the word having learnt it from Derrida. We have made themes of analyses as the anatomist makes drawings of part of a body - a dead body. These are analyses which are in fact part of an overall structure intended to produce a general dethematization. We have arrested them and (perhaps in bad faith) hoped to make them intelligible. Intelligible perhaps, but are they meaningful? Levinas says the Face is meaningful without reference to a system, it is "pure expression", the *face to face* being

the anarchical origin of meaning. We are not, however, despite his insistence in the form of repetition, being asked to accept this in good faith, nor simply as a phenomenological fact. His aim here is to show that the Face signals the call to responsibility, which, however it is thought, should also be understood as a call to philosophy:

"Our whole purpose was to ask if subjectivity, despite its foreignness to the said, is not stated by an abuse of language through which in the indiscretion of the said everything is shown. Everything is shown by indeed betraying its meaning, but philosophy is called upon to reduce that betrayal, by an abuse that justifies proximity itself in which the infinite comes to pass." (OTB 156/198)

Earlier in this chapter we asked about the connection between the exposure of metaphysics to itself as empiricism, associated by Derrida with the Levinasian text and the de-empiricisation of thinking implied in Heidegger's remarks about metaphor. We shall return to this now. The 'de-empiricisation' of thinking in the context of the discussion in RoM means in fact the 'non-metaphysical' thinking of beings (and Being). Levinas' thinking of the thing as 'gift', which we looked at in Chapter 4, also appears in the context of an account of a non-metaphysical signifying. This much they may have in common, but a most significant difference in their thinking is certainly related to

their respective treatment of the subject/object distinction. Levinas sees Heidegger's thinking as being the nadir (or zenith) in a tradition which "dissolves" the subject in its "situation", and it is against this that in his analyses he aims to resurrect it. Doing this may at first sight appear to be a kind of realism of the subject opposed to which, as one might expect, the ideal other will be classically opposed. That this is not the case is clear from the nature of this account of subjectivity, whose meaning, it is revealed, is guaranteed not by the system in which it arises but in relation to the Other. In Heidegger's account the subject/object distinction comes to be thought in the space opened up by the withdrawal of Being. In this withdrawal or this trace of the originary withdrawal, the thought of alterity, and of all difference, emerges at the same time and in some sort of dialectical relation to the thought of sameness. This withdrawal is the opening of language for Heidegger. The questioning of Being in Heidegger does not therefore interrupt this withdrawal because the logos cannot interrupt itself in a *decisive* manner. The sense of 'decisive' we are now appealing to is the one appropriate to the interruption of the Said by the Saying; the interruption which is capable of "renewing" or "founding" the Said. The *questioning* of Being cannot effectuate such an interruption because it was always already an intrinsic

possibility of (the withdrawal of) Being. What is the skeptical statement to the metaphysics of Being? A problem of logic, and nothing beyond that - a call falling on deaf ears?

Is the talk of the Other, which is said not to be the empirical other person, *as if* it were the other person, simply pathos? And if it is true as Derrida suggests,³⁴ that some of the most decisive moments of Levinas' discourse are to be found in his use of pathos, does this imply that his use of ethical language, which "imposes itself on his discourse", is arbitrarily 'ethical'. In other words, how are we to relate to Levinas' calling this discourse on the *otherwise than being ethics*? Is the legitimacy of this solely to be decided according to the nature of the "imposition" by which ethical language presents itself to thought at the point of reversal. Could the whole thing have been expressed in another *grand metaphor*? Can such a linguistic relativism be taken seriously? Certainly there are questions posed with regard to the nature of language which despite a more serious guise are in fact of this order. Such 'seriousness' would, according to Levinas' thesis, indicate a lack of seriousness vis a vis the Other, because it is the kind of seriousness which in fact belies an 'ethical neutrality' with regard to the Other. Levinas sees this neutrality in

all attempts to think language in its Being. ^{as} The 'difference' between the 'I' and the Other in the I-Other conjuncture of the *face to face* is often referred to as the "non-indifference" to the Other. The difference between the I and the other, thought on the basis of their being, is indifference to the Other's unicity, which is always reduced in thought according to the neutrality of the common denominator of being. The destination of this *ethics* in Levinas' thinking is somewhere we are always already on the way back from. For him the question is one of the route back to philosophy, of philosophizing as *Unsay*ing such that in this thinking the Infinite comes to (have) pass(ed): "The infinity of the infinite lives in going backwards".

We have just said that the supplementary theory of the Saying and the Said must be seen as exactly that: supplementary to the discourse on the Face. Levinas' discourse nowhere appears as the abstraction of neutral theorizing, and although the Other is not the empirical other person nor the *third party* the empirical third person, this is what this discourse is 'about' - at least on one level. There is definitely a sense in which the question as to "what it is all about..." gets answered in Levinas. Not that this means the literal end to philosophy, the question having been thus

answered. On the contrary it indicates a new way of thinking in which *nothing* would remain as it was.

Once again we return to this idea that 'after' the break with metaphysics, nothing will remain the same. We reflected on the all-encompassing 'potential' of Derrida's Deconstruction in the same terms earlier (in Ch.1) and related it to the all-encompassing parameters of Hegel's system, in view of Derrida's own sense of the *transgression* (Ch.3 f.n.1). The entire question of the end of philosophy, its transformation, overcoming, and *the beyond* is structured around the sense and difference of belonging to and transcendence of the tradition. We have used Derrida's thinking in this thesis as a means of gathering the thinking for which the holding together of the tradition, as a feature of transcending it, takes on, what could be described as, an 'active' role. This *conserving* of the tradition is seen partly as what prevents, or preserves, transgressive thinking from becoming neutral in the sense of slipping into meaninglessness. It is also understood to be a moment of the *necessity* by which metaphysics occurs as a going beyond itself; as a going beyond Being. Levinas' thinking which claims to be thinking *from beyond Being*, would be, if the claim is authentic, such that these other transgressive discourses we have referred to, could be inscribed

within its own 'dialectic'. Unlike these other transgressive discourses, Levinas' understanding of the danger of thinking becoming *neutral* is not in terms of its becoming *non-sense*, but rather in terms of its failing to address the Other other than in precisely such terms of sense and nonsense, as if the difference between these two, this metaphysics of intelligibility, was *all of thought*. He believes that in such a metaphysics the Other is reduced to the other within the same. We have seen how this *totalisation* of the Other relates to the *ethical* in Levinas, and is the situation against which he presents the ethical relation in his writings.

This does not imply that his thinking is not a contribution to the theoretical considerations which we discussed in Chapter 1, in the sections on Derrida's thinking of the Inside/Outside and in Chapter 3, on Levinas' thinking of the trace. How these are related to one another in Levinas' work should in any case be quite clear now.

When Derrida says that perhaps what Levinas' thinking does is reveal metaphysics to itself as empiricism, there is in fact something of interest in this thought, despite our rejection of what is understood to follow from it (expressed at the end of Ch.4). This revelation

calls metaphysics to rethink empiricism as such and therefore all that has always been thought by means of empiricism. Perhaps this is the way to approach the somewhat confusing and sometimes seemingly contradictory ambivalence to the thinking of the Other qua other person in Levinas. Perhaps we have never known what/who the other person is? The suggestion is reminiscent of the story of Heraclitus warming his hands at the fire and telling the others that "there are Gods here too".³⁶ And surely the story can be similarly related to Heidegger's sense of astonishment at the Being of beings; that is, an astonishment always *in view of* beings and yet also of something other. And is it not the case that what we called the de-empiricisation of thinking, implied in the remarks on the withdrawal of metaphor, is similarly an attempt to think what we know from experience in the ordinary metaphysical sense, *otherwise*? This sweeping simplification implies something that Derrida might be happy to agree with, namely, that the overcoming of metaphysics can only be in the form of it thinking itself *otherwise*. And the difference between this *otherwise* and *repetition* would be the entire content of some sort of strategic quasi-metaphysical thinking, the kind of which Derrida is a chief proponent and which we looked at in Chapter 1.

" Shouldn't we ask..if language is not *of itself unbound* and thus open to the wholly other; to its own beyond....such that it is less a matter of exceeding that language than of treating otherwise its own possibilities?" (ECM 27)

Levinas' thinking understands this *otherwise* differently. His work argues that the *otherwise than being* is not the thought of Being formulated otherwise, but refers to a relation to the Other inconceivable within the thought of Being and therefore takes us beyond Being. From the outset, we have shown, he understands that the presentation of this account, which is a "response", involves showing the manner in which ontological metaphysics is founded, renewed and justified by the 'ethical'. This is done from within and against that tradition, which, in its most general form, Levinas describes as a destruction of transcendence.

There are many themes running throughout Levinas work which we have not dealt with in this thesis, but which nonetheless together with the ones we have addressed, work together, often unsystematically, to represent the transcendence which underwrites the metaphysical text and in doing so marks the text with a trace. There are certainly many routes by which one can approach Levinas' thought. We have presented this reading of Levinas on the basis of the work of our first chapter

and located it within the discourse on the end of philosophy. We have not attempted to identify a 'method' at work in Levinas' work taken as whole. That we have drawn attention to what we have described as a kind of supplementary theorizing alongside the phenomenological studies and various quasi-phenomenological analyses reflects the approach we have taken in general and a certain critical apparatus that could not be left behind like a dirty pair of shoes at the door. We are not claiming that the *end of philosophy* context is the only possible context in which to read Levinas claims for the ethical. An internal critique would be a least one other that must be explored.

Ontological metaphysics, including the metaphysics of the reversal in Heidegger for Levinas, seeks and desires the Saying to be the "pure communication of the Said." (OTB 134/171) At times this is the charge with which Derrida challenges Levinas' thinking: that thinking the Saying as a pure Said is the (non-) alternative to passing through the ontological difference. In this dialogue, with Derrida as the interlocutor, it must be said, this seems to be something all would agree on, namely, that the notion of a pure Said, or inversely, a pure Saying in the

Said, is metaphysical idealism: something to which all are unequivocally and unambiguously opposed.

In the course of this thesis we have seen, following Heidegger and Derrida, how a reflection on the nature of language comes to occupy thought concerned with the *end of philosophy*. Of all beings, why does language offer the significant resistance to its ontic determination? This question is answered in Heidegger, differently in different periods of his thought, but from the outset always in terms of the special reflexivity proper to *questioning*. We agree with Derrida when he says that Levinas' philosophy, too, is centrally concerned with

...questions of language: questions of language and the question of language...there is no element of Levinas' thought which is not, in and of itself, engaged by such questions..." (VM 109)

However, Levinas does not say that the question of language imposes itself on thinking at the end of philosophy, but that "ethical language" imposes itself on the thought of the Other in philosophy. Language is, for Levinas, the *event* of the ethical. It is, emphatically, not an ethical *phenomenon*, and the claims demonstrating, linking and drawing on the ethical in

life and philosophy are not phenomenological as such. This should in any case be clear from the discussion above. Levinas' discourse on ethics at no point digresses into a polemic about categorizing and decategorizing discourse. In our reading of Levinas we have seen that language, the logos, requires its being (to be) interrupted and that in the same moment that this happens, the other is stated:

"...the hitherside of the ego lends itself to our speaking only by referring to being, from which it withdraws and which it undoes. The said of language always says being. But in the moment of an enigma language also breaks with its own conditions, as in a skeptical saying, and says a signification before the event, a before-being."

(OTB 196f.n.20)

But that language breaks with its own conditions, is something language will never be made to admit. In the absence of this confession what can we do but take the word of the Other?

Footnotes and References

Chapter 1

1. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, p.441
2. Werner Marx, Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. Peter Heath, Harper and Row, New York, 1975, p.3
3. Michel Foucault, "The Orders of Discourse", trans. R.Swyer, in Social Sciences Info., Part 2, Apr. 1971, pp 7-30, p.28
4. C.f. Sam Ijsseling "Heidegger and the Destruction of Ontology", trans. Wilson Brown, in Man and World 15:3-16, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1982.
5. C.f. Heidegger, What is Metaphysics, trans. R.F.C.Hull and A.Crick, in Werner Brock, Existence and Being, London, 1949. Also in the D.F.Krell translation in Basic Writings, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978.
6. C.f. Heidegger, Hegel's Concept of Experience, trans. Kenley Royce Dove, Harper Row, New York, 1970.
7. C.f. for example, Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, trans F.D.Wieck and G.Gray, Harper Row, New York, 1968, p.79f. "Starting from (the being which is) man, Dasein, thinking learns that it is in a non-negational, non-dialectical relation to Being."
8. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in Basic Writings (BW), ed. D.F.Krell, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977. pp.189-242.

9. Heidegger, op cit p.235
10. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking" (EPTT) in BW, op cit, pp.369-392
11. Heidegger, op cit, p.376
12. ibid p.377
13. ibid p.375
14. Heidegger, Nietzsche, trans. D.F.Krell, Harper Row, New York, 1979, Vol.1 §20 p.202
15. Heidegger, The End of Philosophy, trans. J.Stambaugh, Harper Row, New York, 1973, p.85 (my emphasis).
16. Heidegger, EPTT, op cit, p.375
17. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. Hollingdale, Penguin, Middlesex, 1977.
18. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Hollingdale, Penguin, Middlesex, 1975.
19. C.f. Nietzsche, The Gay Science, trans. W.Kaufmann, Random House, New York, 1974, BookIV §341.
20. Nietzsche, "Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense", trans. M.A.Mügge, reprinted in The Existentialist Tradition, ed. Nino Langiulli, Anchor, 1971, pp.75-88
21. ibid p.77
22. ibid p.77/9
23. The word coined by Derrida and now so widely used it has assumed the status of a concept and in some

circles thought to be the name of a method of literary criticism. It is reminiscent and related to Heidegger's De-struktion mentioned above in that it transcends the distinction between the what reading subject does in the reading and the contribution of the text and refers us directly to *what is happening*. See below and Ch.5. where we return to this.

24. Heidegger, "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics", trans. W.Kaufmann in W.Kaufmann, Existentialism, Meridian, New York, 1957.

25. C.f. BT, p.41 f.n. 1 26. BT §6 p.44

27. Nietzsche, "Truth and Falsity...", op cit, p.80

28. C.f. Deleuze, Nietzsche and Philosophy, trans. H.Tomlinson, Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1983, p.49-52, and Nietzsche, The Will to Power, trans. Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1968, §618ff.

29. Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. G.C.Spivak, John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1974, p.46

30. Derrida, "Ousia and Grammé: A note to a footnote in Being and Time", trans. E.S.Casey, in Phenomenology in Perception, ed. F.J.Smith, The Hague 1980, p.93. Re-translated in A.Bass (ed.) Margins of Philosophy, Chicago U.P., Chicago, 1982, pp.29-67.

31. Derrida, Positions, trans. A.Bass, Athlone, London, 1981, p.10

32. This *neutrality* could alternatively be understood as a leaving everything as it is. Levinas seeks to inscribe this very attempt to pass between the two in a

broader notion of neutrality, vis a vis the other qua Other. We shall come to this below.

33. The difference between these two is, strictly speaking, *in the reading*.

34. Derrida, Positions, p.22

35. C.f., for example, Derrida, Spurs, trans. B. Harlow, Chicago U.P., Chicago, 1978, and also Positions, p.10

36. C.f. Derrida, "The Ends of Man", in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol.30, No.1, 1969 p.56. This essay is reprinted in Margins of Philosophy, op cit, pp.109-136.

37. Derrida, Spurs, op cit

38. Derrida, Positions, p.57

39. Derrida, Speech and Phenomena(SP), trans. D.B. Allinson, Northwestern Univ. Press, Evanston, 1973, p.130

40. Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp. 30-65

41. This "perhaps" is the mark of a systematically inscribed *hesitation*, as thought hovers both inside and outside metaphysics, in Derrida, and referred to in terms of undecidability. This hesitation bears a certain resemblance to the *postponement* of totality in Levinas, in the ethical relation. However, we shall not make a digression in this direction here.

42. C.f. Derrida, Positions, p.67

43. For more on this notion of authorial control in Derrida and its implications see David Wood, "Derrida and the paradoxes of Reflection" in J.B.S.P. Vol 11 No 3, Oct. 1980.

44. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics" in Writing and Difference(VM), pp.79-153, trans. A.Bass, Univ. of Chicago 1978, p.111

45. Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme", p.12

46. Derrida, Positions, p.104 f.n.31, quoting himself from his essay "Differance" in SP, p.129ff.

47. Throughout this thesis we are following Lingis in his translation of the French autrui/Autrui by the word *Other* spelt with a capital letter, and autre/Autre by *other*. Surprisingly little is lost by only having one word for each couple. This is because as Levinas' thesis progresses the reader gains the sense of the contiguity of the 'individual' Other (autrui) and the Other (Autrui) as the overlap in the relation to the Other (autrui/Autrui) is part of what the *ethical relation* is about.

47a. This notion of obligation, is expressed, for example, at TI 207/181-2 in the following:

"The Other faces me and puts me in question and oblige me by his essence qua infinity." This originary obligation is something Levinas is seeking to give expression to in both his major works. Derrida makes great play of it in his second important essay on Levinas' thought, ECM, an essay responding to the later work, OTB. In that essay he uses the expression : Il me oblige, writing the Il with a capital letter, referring to Levinas personally, and the me unabbreviated,

stressing the individuality of the one addressed - perhaps Derrida *in person*. Levinas' expression me voici, used in various places in OTB, is, in this thesis, linked with it, below, as if they were correlate accounts of (a) the 'hereness' of the 'I', reduced to the pure accusative in the *face to face*, and (b) of the 'I''s obligation to the Other, which is always already-taken-on. (C.f. p.228f below). The value of doing this, in this thesis, is related to our attempt to follow Levinas' rejection of the traditional supposition of the irreversibility of the conceptual moment in philosophy. (C.f. Ch.4 and 5).

48. C.f. Levinas, "God and Philosophy", trans. R.A.Cohen, in Philosophy Today 22, Summer 1978, pp.127-147. Also to be found in Collected Philosophical Papers, trans. A.Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1987.

49. C.f. Ch.2 f.n.5 below

50. The word, Levinas informs us, is borrowed from Jean Wahl. Although mentioned only once in TI it is nevertheless generally descriptive of the entire movement presented in the book, for that reason we use it as a title for Ch.4 below.

51. TI 199/173

52. Levinas, "Transcendance et Hauteur" in Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie 56 (Jan. 1962), pp.89-101, trans. here by T.Chanter, unpublished.

53. C.f. TI 203/177-8

53a. C.f. TI 170/144, and "posterity of the anterior" at TI 54/25.

54 C.f. for example OTB 24

55. C.f also the citation from Merleau-Ponty above p.14

56. On the "abuse of language" as it is understood by Levinas see below Ch.5

Chapter 2

1. C.f. THI op cit (c.f. 'Abbreviations' above)
p.67/104

2. Deleted

3. Levinas, "L'Oeuvre de E.Husserl", Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger, CXXIX (Jan-Feb 1940), pp.33-85. Reprinted in En Découvrant L'Existence avec Husserl et Heidegger, 2nd Ed. Paris, J.Vrin, 1967.

4. C.f. Orianne, "Translators Foreword" to THI.

5. These "certain moments" for Levinas are, for instance, the thought of the Good beyond being in Plato, the thought of the infinite in Descartes and the Plotinian ichnos of the Fifth Ennead. His understanding of the latter is central to his thinking on the trace, (discussed in Ch.3). Incidentally, Derrida also refers to the Enneads in relation to the "transgression" of

metaphysics in Speech and Phenomena trans. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern, 1973. p.127 fn.8 . It is important to remember that these moments are themselves "historical" and are not *decisive* in the same sense as are the epochs of Being for Heidegger. As we shall see below, it is the Instant of the interruption of the same which is of a *decisive* nature for Levinas.

6. The totality appears to complete itself in the time of duration, the time in which beings endure, but this is, Levinas seeks to show, 'merely' apparent.

7. C.f. for example OTB 15/18-19

8. The theme of the "interruption" of totality and metaphysics is central to the reading of Levinas' thought of metaphysics/other relation. We deal with this directly in Ch.s 3-5

9. C.f. also the section "Things, Giving and Objectivity" in Ch.4

10. Levinas expresses this antecedence by means of the term anterior posteriori. See above ch1 f.n.53a.

11. This notion of a reduction "in reverse" is that by which we characterize the movement of transcendence in Levinas and which we shall *repeatedly* return to.

12. The use of the term surprise as it appears in OTB is discussed in Ch.5.

13. On the empirical and the metaphorical, see Ch.s 4 and 5.

14. Heidegger, Letter on Humanism, in Basic Writings, Ed. D.F.Krell, Harper and Row, New York, 1977.
15. Op cit p.195
16. That Heidegger says " Time passes. And it passes so that it passes away" would be further evidence for Levinas to relegate his thinking of time to the time of "economy". C.f. Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, trans. Wieck/Gray, New York, Harper Row, 1968, p.96. Was Heisst Denken, Tübingen, 1954, p.39.
17. C.f. also further references to the "caress" in Ch.4
18. This formula used in OTB brings together many themes of Levinas. Its citation here is referred to the subject's identification vis a vis the Other. In OTB it refers also to the sense in which the text for the 'reader' is punctured and punctuated by the signifying of the Other, non-inscribable within the text, but always implied in the text's very having been handed over; its having been *given* (c.f. Ch.4) C.f. also Derrida's "En ce moment même dans cette Ouvrage me voici", in Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas, Ed. François Laruelle, Paris, Editions Jean-Michel, 1980, p.21-60. He discusses there, amongst other things, the me voici and the notion of interruption in Levinas.
19. C.f. OTB 112/143 and Llewelyn Beyond Metaphysics, Humanities, New Jersey, 1983, Ch.10.
20. In VM, op cit, p.312 fn.7, Derrida says: "In TI the use of metaphor, remaining admirable and most often - if not always - beyond rhetorical abuse, shelters within its pathos the most decisive movements of its

discourse." Later in this thesis we ask if these "metaphors" and this "pathos" play the role equivalent to the one assigned to them in metaphysics or whether Levinas gives us to think what they speak of otherwise than can be conceived under their description as 'metaphors' and 'pathos' as such.

21. When the 'I' as the pure accusative me voici faces the Other and asks the question "who are you?"; asks as to what Levinas calls the quiescence of the Other, the response is not a symmetrical "me voici aussi", but "you shall not commit murder". We can see here why the asymmetry of the ethical relation is the point at which Levinas distinguishes his thinking from that of the I-Thou of Buber. (C.f. Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Kaufmann, T.T Clark, Edinburgh, 1970.

22. The French word sens means both 'meaning' and 'direction'. We shall see how both of these meanings are in play in Levinas' use of the term, when for example we think of the meaning of "orientation" or the meaning of the reduction of the Saying to the Said and vice versa (c.f. especially Ch.5).

23. Perhaps Sartre caught a glimpse of this when he said that the length of a life was irrelevant to its meaningfulness?

24. C.f. Bernasconi, "Levinas on Time and the Instant", in Time and Metaphysics Ed. Wood and Bernasconi, Parousia Press, Warwick, 1982.

25. Below we ask if this very gesture itself could be described as a feature of Levinasian *ethical neutrality*.

26. C.f. Ch.3 on Levinas critique of maieutics.

Chapter 3

1. In Ch. 1 we hinted that the possible neutrality of deconstruction might consist in its "leaving everything the same", now it may appear that we are suggesting the opposite. These 'opposites' are in a sense two sides of the same coin. The question is whether they are opposites or the same under two different descriptions. We must bear in mind that "the transgression of discourse must, in some fashion, and like every transgression, conserve or confirm what it exceeds". ("From Restricted to General Economy" in Writing and Difference, op cit, p.274) Obviously this "in some fashion" will determine what *exceeding* metaphysics might be understood to mean.

2. and 3. deleted 4. Op cit.

5. Bernasconi, "The Trace of Levinas in Derrida", in Derrida and Difference, Parousia Press, Univ. of Warwick, 1985, p.28.

6. Op cit

7. C.f Derrida, Speech and Phenomena, op cit, p.131.

8. Heidegger, "The Anaximander Fragment" in Early Greek Thinking, trans. D.F.Krell, Harper Row, New York, 1975.

9. Derrida, Of Grammatology, op cit, p.12.

10. This "productive" begs the question about the 'aim' of deconstruction. Used here it refers to the extent to which a deconstructive reading is capable of exposing metaphysical presuppositions, for example, or deferring the text's recapture by metaphysics.

11. Levinas, "La trace de l'autre". Published in Tijdschrift voor Filosofie 25 (Sept. 1963), pp.605-623. Reprinted in En Découvrant L'Existence, op cit, pp.187-202. Translated as "On the Trail of the Other" by D.J.Hoy (TO) in Philosophy Today Vol. 10, No.1, 1966 pp.34-36. Also available translated by A.Lingis as "The Trace of the Other" in Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy, ed. M.Taylor, Chicago Univ. Press, Chicago, 1987, pp.345-359. This second translation came to my attention too late to be used here. Note that in the Hoy translation the English word 'countenance' translates the French word visage.

12. Levinas, "La signification et le sens", first published in Revue de métaphysique et de morale No.2, 1964, reprinted in Humanisme de l'autre homme, Montpellier, Fata Morgana, 1972. Trans. A.Lingis "Meaning and Sense" in Collected Philosophical Papers, op cit.

13. Levinas, "Le temps et l'autre", first published in Le choix, le monde, l'existence, Paris, Arthaud, 1947, pp.125-196. The article is reprinted as a book of the same title by Fata Morgana, Paris, 1983. All page references are to this edition. All translations here are from R.A.Cohen Time and the Other (TA), Duquesne U.P., Pitts., forthcoming (1987).

14. Levinas, TA, op cit, p.77
101/173-4

15. C.f. EE

16. Levinas, TO, op cit, p.34

17. C.f. for example Levinas' polemicising against Heidegger' ecstatic Dasein at TI 94f/67f

18. TO, op cit, p.37

19. *ibid*

20. *ibid* p.39

21. *ibid*

22. *ibid* p.40

23. *ibid*

24. For Derrida's remarks on Levinas' claims for the asymmetry of the relation to the other, see VM p.128. C.f. also TI 35 "The metaphysician and the other do not constitute a simple correlation, which would be reversible." It seems extraordinary that Derrida should suggest that there is no sense in which I am the Other's Other in Levinas. The entire thinking of the relation between the *face to face* and the *third party* stays with the paradox of this irreversible asymmetry and seeks to articulate it in terms of the plurality of Others, but without reducing the relation to one of reciprocity. This is Levinas' problem and we look at it closely in Ch.4.

25. TO, op cit, p.43

26. Perhaps this is what Derrida is referring to when he suggests the most decisive movements in Levinas' discourse are related to pathos, c.f. WD p.312 fn.7.

27. TO, op cit, p.45

28. Derrida, Positions, op cit, p.58

29. Positions, p.60

30. TO, op cit p.44. The notion of *illeity* is held to transcend the distinction between my relation to the other person who enters upon the scene qua *third party*. My relation to the *third party* is through my objective knowledge of him. The relation to the third is the archetypal, or even empirical, encounter with the other person, but it is held to already refer us to the *face to face*.

31. TO p.44

32. TO p.44/5

33. TO p.45

34. C.f. final section Ch.4

35. C.f. Bernasconi, "The Trace of Levinas in Derrida", op cit p.28 and his f.n.16 p.43 . Later, in OTB, Levinas adopts the formulation we cited in Ch. 2 p., "a past which was never present", c.f. OTB 24/31.

36. TO, op cit, p.46

37. C.f. Positions, p.104 f.n.31

38. In OTB Levinas affirms this difference with Hegel when he says "Arising at the apex of essence, goodness is *other* than being. It no longer keeps accounts; it is not like negativity, which conserves what it negates in history" OTB 18/22.

39. C.f., and with further reference to Hegel, OTB 194 f.n. 3 "Anarchy cannot be sovereign like *anarchè*. Also, on the "anarchy of God in discourse" OTB 128/165 and OTB 151/192-3. In relation to time and presence see OTB 51/66: "This anarchy, this refusal to be assembled into representation" - to mention but a few references.

40. C.f. Of Grammatology, op cit, p.70/1

41. C.f. Bernasconi, op cit.

42. C.f. TI 52/23

43. Levinas, "Entre Deux Mondes" (A spiritual biography of F. Rosenzweig) in La conscience Juive - donne et débats, ed. E.A.Levy-Valensi and J.Halperin, P.U.F., Paris 1963, p.121-137. An extract from this is printed as "Franz Rosenzweig", trans. R.A.Cohen in Midstream, Vol 29, No.9, Nov., 1983, pp.33-40.

44. Derrida's thinking, too, represents a move against the irremiscible Hegel, but we shall not raise the question of Derrida's relation to dialectics here.

45. C.f. Bernasconi, "Derrida on Levinas: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics", in R.A.Cohen (ed), Face to Face with Levinas, SUNY Press, New York, 1986.

Chapter 4

1. It is this understanding of the necessity of the conceptual moment in terms of being at the same time, that Levinas' thinking takes issue with. C.f. below and next chapter.

2. C.f. above C.h. 2 p. 89

3. For a discussion of the "speculative" nature of Levinas' thinking on the face, see R.Bernasconi's "Levinas Face to Face - with Hegel", J.B.S.P., Vol 13 No.3, Oct. 1982, p.267-276.

4. For Derrida's remarks on the use of the spatial metaphor of 'height' here c.f. VM 93.

5. On this model the Hegelian subject would never attain the Infinite as absolute transcendence (Autrui) but only the infinite other (Autre) unfolded through moments of negation as historical absolute subjectivity. In other words, Hegelian desire is equivalent to need in Levinas' account. c.f Bernasconi op cit.

6. Levinas, "Transcendance et hauteur", op cit, p.6

7. In VM (p.123-126) Derrida defends Husserl against Levinas with regard to the respect of the true meaning of alterity vis a vis the Other. At the same time he argues that Levinas' notion of the asymmetry of the I - Other conjuncture must rest on a symmetry between subjects, because the thinking of symmetry and asymmetry are not inseparable in a way Derrida understands Levinas to require them to be. As in other places Derrida's point is that Levinas denies, or, "deprives himself of the very possibility of his own language" (VM *ibid*). Whereas Husserl "gives himself the *right to speak* of the infinitely other as such, accounting for the origin and legitimacy of his language" (*ibid*). Levinas does not in fact deny the symmetry of relations in general between others, and this goes too for relations between "existents". It is within the gaze of the *third party* that the two in the *face to face* appear as equals, and this could be called an empirical symmetry, but the thought of the *beyond being* in Levinas also calls for a radical rethinking of the empirical, as we shall consider in the final section of this chapter, one which goes beyond the mere exposure of empiricism to itself as (ontological) metaphysics. When Derrida says: "Dissymmetry itself would be impossible without symmetry (and)...this dissymmetry is an *economy* in a new sense; a sense which

would probably be intolerable to Levinas", we would add that this economy is never denied by Levinas. On the contrary, he would argue that it occurs with a necessity, but at the same time emphasise that the very possibility that this economy (of being) can think itself as such requires the beyond being; the thought of the Infinite within the finite.

8. We shall return to this idea in Ch.5, below.

9. C.f. TI 65/36 and above Ch.3 f.n.39

10. C.f. Ch.2 p.99 ff.

11. All along we are seeking an answer to the question as to whether a thinking of the *breached-totality* would be equivalent to the thought of *closure* as it is expressed in Derrida.

12. c.f. OTB 143/183 "Saying is inseparable from giving", and, TI 173/148 "The relationship with the Other, transcendence, consists in speaking the world to the Other."

13. That the two different images of the *face to face* can be shown to bear a relation to each other is not the most important thing here. The attempt to assimilate them through their reference to things and objectivity in the notion of *giving* is, however, useful in relation to the general attempt to demonstrate the sense in which the relation to the beyond being goes through the conceptual moment in Levinas.

14. A thing, it might be expected would pass through the *face to face* like a brick through a window. One is

reminded of how in Sartre's Psychology of the Imagination, in presenting an account of the mental image, he says that the image could not be immanent to consciousness, and if it were then the transparency of consciousness to itself would be shattered.

15. C.f. EE 34/48-50 and TI 133/106.

16. That it is only part of it is because Levinas' account of finitude cannot accurately be assessed in relation to his reading of Heidegger because of the problems mentioned earlier with regard to this polemic. As we do not think that "correcting" Levinas' reading of Heidegger on various points, points on which there is a 'common wisdom', is a very fruitful way of reading Levinas, we shall not proceed with such criticism at here.

17. C.f. my paper "Responding to Levinas" in The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other, Bernasconi and Wood (eds.), R.K.P., 1988 (forthcoming).

18. This is what Derrida is referring to when he says,

"One already foresees the unease to which a thought rejecting the excellence of theoretical rationality will have to resign itself later, especially in that it never ceases to appeal to the most uprooted rationalism and universalism against the violences of mysticism and history, against the ravishing of enthusiasm and ecstasy...The complicity of theoretical objectivity and mystical communion will be Levinas' true target. The premetaphysical unity of one and the same violence. An alternation which always modifies the same confinement of the other." (VM 87)

19. C.f. for example, OTB 5/5-6. Also, on "...disinterestedness imposed with a good violence", OTB 43/56

20. c.f. Difficile Liberté: Essais sur le Judaïsme (1963) in Quatre Lectures Talmudiques Albin Michel, Paris, 1968, p.36.

21. For further remarks on the *feminine* in Levinas c.f. TA pp.77-82, and the following essays "Le Judaïsme et le Féminin" in Difficile liberté, op cit, and "Judaism and the feminine element", trans. E. Wyschogrod, in Judaism, Vol. XVIII, 1969, pp.30-38. For a discussion see Derrida's essay ECM, op cit. Also TA, pp.77-82, and T. Chanter's "The Alterity and Immodesty of Time: Death as Future and Eros as Feminine in Levinas" in A. Benjamin and D. Wood (eds.) Writing the Future, Warwick Studies in Philosophy, R.K.P., London, (forthcoming).

22. This phrase used by Levinas in the context of the command "thou shalt not commit murder" might also be appropriate here. The connection between the two is that they both refer to a point at which the totality is in danger of closing upon itself; completing itself. In the context of Eros we shall see this danger takes the form of thought stopping short of the ethical relation and falsely taking Eros, an ecstatic relation in which separation is lacking, to be the ultimate relation. This would also come under the rubric of 'mystical communion', one of the two violences which Derrida correctly describes as Levinas' main targets, the other being the excellence of theoretical rationality. (c.f. fn.17)

23. "Voluptuosity profanes it does not see" (TI 260/238)

24. Fecundity, we might add here, can also be said to be a form of *third party* in so far as it turns into fraternity. What is more important than the names Levinas gives to these relations is the movement they articulate: in this case it is the 'turning into', or 'reverting' that must be understood as this is central to the claim of Levinas' entire thesis, as we shall see below and in Ch.5.

25. In TI it is because Eros ultimately turns into filiality and fraternity that it can ultimately be related back to the *face to face* relation which encompasses the *third party*, in its becoming dialogue which "opens the erotic upon a social life, all signifyingness and decency" (TI 280/257).

26. N.B. the plurality of subjects here is maintained. In Levinas this is the role of the body: it maintains *position*, it is the *site of identification*, even in sleep and unconsciousness.

27. C.f. EE 91/155-7. Cited above Ch.2 p.107

28. In EE 44-5/68 Levinas talks of the "sincerity of life" when polemicizing against Heidegger's for-the-sake-of-which. In this sense the sincerity of the caress of the consoler is not for the sake of anything but is an end in itself, is the unity of life and its meaning, which, qua theory, is always late in relation to life itself.

29. An idea expressed by Luce Irigaray in "Fécondité de la Caresse: Lecture de Levinas, Totalité et Infini

section IVB 'Phénoménologie de L'Eros"', in éthique de la Différence Sexuelle, Editions Minuit, Paris, 1984, pp. 173-199.

30. In the terminology of OTB we would refer to proximity here. We are not, in saying this, simply equating the *face to face* and proximity, as will become clear below.

31. The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymetry of proximity in which the face is looked at. There is weighing, thought, objectification, and thus a decree in which my anarchic relationship with illeity is betrayed but in which it is conveyed before us. There is betrayal of my anarchic relation with illeity, but also a new relationship with it.." (OTB 158/201).

32. He might also say the trace of *illeity*. In Ch.3 we came across this term as it is used in the essay The Trace of the Other. The term is intended to capture the sense in which the Other is Another and not an impersonal One. c.f. OTB 12/13

33. This is because the reflection by which the *third party* withdraws from the *face to face* is a 'telling' the total to someone. c.f. TI 295/271-2.

34. Deleted

35. "As He and the third person (signifying) is somehow outside of the distinction between being and entities." Levinas, "Meaning and Sense", in Collected Philosophical Papers, op cit. , p.106. Perhaps we should be wary of our own description of the *third party* in Levinas as "problematic". The compounding of references to the flowing relation between me, the third, the Other and *illeity*, indicates a deliberate

and utter ambivalence which forestalls any certainty with regard to our relation to the Other.

36. C.f. OTB 119/152-3

37. C.f. Ch.5 p.278

38. We have described the sense in which this "certain violence" is not rejected as such by Levinas. If you like, it is the violent economy of being that is interrupted by the *face to face*. In saying this it is by no means obvious that Levinas' claims for the priority of ethics over ontology are 'utopian', which is a mistake that can only be made by thinking that the ethical relation could be maintained without this economic violence. We are arguing throughout to the contrary.

39. Seen from the 'other side', what is in fact 'irreversible' for Levinas is the "absolute past" of the Other "having passed by" (*le déjà dépassé*) and which is marked by the *trace*. C.f. "Meaning and Sense", *op cit*, p.106. Ontological metaphysics only knows the fact of the Other's having passed by, whereas thinking from within the *trace* "...is the passage (*la passe*) itself toward a past which is further removed than any past from any future, a passage which is still taking place in my time", *TO op cit*, p.46. In Ch.5 we shall see the sense in which this passage, in OTB, is expressly related to the "unsaying of the said".

Chapter 5.

1. C.f. TI 35/5-6

2. Levinas "Tout Autrement", L'arc: Jacques Derrida, 54, pp.33-37, 1973. Reprinted in Noms Propres, Fata

Morgana, Montpellier, 1976. Trans. S.Critchley, to be published in R.Bernasconi (ed.) Re-reading Levinas, forthcoming.

3. *ibid*

4. The two terms Saying (dire) and Said (dit) appear when used or referred to here with capital letters.

5. C.f. OTB 25/31 "The other to whom the petition of the question is addressed does not belong to the intelligible field to be explored."

6. Heidegger thinks this in terms of the Lichtung.

7. C.f. Heidegger's On Time and Being, trans. J.Stambaugh, Harper Row, 1972, p.66.

8. C.f. Ch.2 9. C.f. Ch.4

10. C.f. further discussion below.

11. C.f. OTB 59/75-6 12. E.g. c.f. OTB 44/56-7

13. OTB p.xlii

14. The double meaning of the French word sens, which, we noted above means both 'meaning' and 'direction', is often in play in Levinas and the significance of this could not be clearer than in his thinking of the reduction.

15. C.f. Ch.4 p.214 above.

16. The "written" word is here being presented as a paradigm of the Said and the "spoken" word of the

Saying. This is a schematic simplification at this point. Of course the spoken is also a Said. It should not be supposed that that this implies a 'rejection' of the written in this relegation of it to a certain secondarity. We do not intend to pursue this here as our way of access to what is being said here takes a different route.

17. In "God and Philosophy" (Translated by R.A.Cohen in Philosophy Today, Vol.22, 1978, pp.127-145, p.132 [Revised version in Collected Philosophical Papers, op cit.]) Levinas relates this to Descartes, saying, "Descartes...has sketched the extraordinary course of a thought that proceeds on to the break-up of the *I think*."

18. En ce moment même dans ce ouvrage me voici, op cit. Hereafter ECM, all translations of which here are my own.

19. The metaphor of "fabric" and the variations on it - of sewing and resewing, tying, retying, cutting the knot etc., is in fact shared by Levinas and Derrida. In fact its being taken up in OTB is a sign of his entering into a dialogue with Derrida. When Derrida, in ECM, says that the metaphors of seam and tear "obsess" the text this should perhaps be borne in mind.

20. "La trace doit donc s'y' 'présenter' sans présenter *autrement*."

21. C.f. ECM 39f. According to the metaphor used here, Derrida does not accept the idea that the knots retying the threads of interrupted metaphysics can be cut. For Levinas this cut is the decisive moment 'producing'

diachrony and accounts for the non-correlation of the Saying and the Said.

22. For an interesting discussion of "performative reflexivity" in Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, see D.Wood's "Philosophy as Performance", (unpub.)

23. Derrida, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor", in Enclitic, vol.2 Fall 1978. Hereafter RoM.

24. This question as it appears here in the Derrida text is already an allusion to a text of Heidegger's: "How does it stand today with Being?", as D.Wood points out in "Philosophy as Performance" op cit.

25. "...taking a position on metaphor" here means holding any theory which thinks the general concept of metaphor is to be thought in relation to the notion of *proper meaning*. Although Derrida at no point gives such a reductionistic reading of Levinas' text, this is a kind of spear with which he keeps prodding it. On the one hand it is one reading amongst many, on the other it is a reproach for not posing the question of closure "formally and thematically".

26. C.f. RoM, op cit, p.16

27. On the face of it and because RoM is part of an exchange with Paul Ricoeur, this charge is primarily aimed at him, but the target is, as ever, the metaphysical conception of metaphysics in general. C.f also Derrida, "White Mythology" in A.Bass (ed.) Margins of Philosophy, op cit. And Ricoeur, P. The Rule of Metaphor, Univ. Toronto Press, 1977, esp. Section 8, pp.259-303.

28. This idea of a second-order withdrawal is reminiscent of the relation between non-thetic and reflective consciousness in Sartre: the first founds the second; thought grasps itself, but only 'afterwards'. The difference is, of course, that in Sartre consciousness does this on the basis of a translucency which, it could be shown, is a model for what we have just referred to as "proper meaning". We might characterize the heart of this withdrawal of the withdrawal of metaphor as an opacity, but one not to be conceived in contrast to translucency, because language is never translucent to itself. As Derrida might put it: meaning understood as *s'entendre parler* is wholly metaphysical. (C.f., in particular, Of Grammatology)

29. (C.f. RoM p.15)

30. Heidegger, What is Called Thinking, op cit, p79f.

31. C.f. Heidegger, On the Way to Language

32. C.f. Llewelyn Beyond Metaphysics op cit, Ch.10

33. C.f. VM 90 34. C.f. Ch.2 f.n.20

35. This would also include the thinking which thinks language as a performance which gives rise to the totally other.

36. For a discussion of this story told in Aristotle's De partibus animalium 645a and Heidegger's retelling of it in Letter on Humanism (op cit), c.f. Bernasconi's "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Ethics" in Deconstruction and Philosophy, ed. Sallis, Chicago, Chicago U.P., 1987. pp.123-139.

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